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NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1951

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CONTRIBUTORS

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VERNON WATKINS is a Welsh poet whose work is published here by New Directions.

PETER VIERECK, who teaches history at Mount Holyoke College, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1949.

JAMES BALDWIN is a young American novelist now living in Paris. His essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel," appeared in the June 1949 issue of PR.

ARTHUR MIZENER is the author of "The Far Side of Paradise," a biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

OSCAR HANDLIN's "The Uprooted," a study of immigrant life in America, was published this fall by Little Brown. He is associate professor of history at Harvard.

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Saul Bellows

THE EINHORNS*

William Einhorn was the first superior man I knew. He had a brain and many enterprises, real directing power, philosophical capacity, and if I were methodical enough to take thought before an important and practical decision and also (N.B.) if I were really his disciple and not what I am, I'd ask myself, after, "What would Caesar suffer in this case?" "What would Machiavelli advise or Ulysses do?"—"What would Einhorn think?" I'm not kidding when I enter Einhorn in this eminent list. It was him that I knew, and what I understand of them I first understood in him. Unless you want to say that we're at the dwarf end of all times and mere children whose only share in grandeur is like a boy's share in fairy-tale kings, beings of a different kind from times better and stronger than ours. But if we're comparing men and men, not men and children or men and demigods, which is just what would please Caesar among us teeming democrats, and if we don't have any special wish to abdicate into some different, lower form of existence out of shame of our defects before the golden faces of these and other old-time men, then I have the right to praise Einhorn and not care about smiles of derogation from those who think the race no longer has in any important degree the traits we honor in these fabulous names. But I don't want to be pushed into exaggeration by such opinion, which is the opinion of students who, at all ages, feel their boyishness when they confront the past.

I went to work for Einhorn while I was a high-school junior, not long before the great crash, during the Hoover administration, when Einhorn was still a wealthy man, though I don't believe he was ever so rich as he later claimed, and I stayed on with him after he had lost most of his property. Then, actually, was when I became es-

* A self-contained chapter from *The Life of Augie March* to be published next year by the Viking Press.

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sential to him, not just metaphorical right hand but virtually arms and legs. Einhorn was a cripple who didn't have the use of either, not even partial; only his hands still functioned, and they weren't strong enough to drive a wheel-chair. He had to be rolled and drawn around the house by his wife, brother, relations, or one of the people he usually had on call, either employed by or connected with him. Whether they worked for him or were merely around his house or office, he had a talent for making supernumeraries of them, and there were always plenty of people hoping to become rich, or more rich, if already well-to-do, through the Einhorns. They were the most important real-estate brokers in the district and owned and controlled much property, including the enormous forty-flat building where they lived. The poolroom in the corner store of it was owned outright by them and called *Einhorn's Billiards*. There were six other stores, hardware, fruit, a tin-shop, a restaurant, barber-shop and a funeral parlor belonging to Kinsman whose son it was that ran away with my cousin Howard Coblin to join the Marines against Sandino. The restaurant was the one in which Tambow, the Republican's vote-getter, played cards. The Einhorns were his ex-wife's relatives; they however had never taken sides in the divorce. It wouldn't have become Einhorn Senior, the old Commissioner, who had had four wives himself, two getting alimony still, to be strict with somebody on that account. The Commissioner had never held office, that title was just people's fun. He was an old galliard yet, with white Buffalo Bill Vandyke and he swanked around, still healthy of flesh, in white suits, looking things over with big sex-amused eyes. He had a lot of respect from everyone for his shrewdness and when he opened his grand old mouth to say something about a chattel mortgage or the location of a lot, in his laconic, single-syllabled way, the whole hefty, serious crowd of businessmen in the office stopped their talk. He gave out considerable advice, and Coblin and Five-Properties got him to invest some of their money. Kreines, who did a job for him once in a while, thought he was as wise as a god. "The son is smart," he said, "but the Commissioner . . . that's really a man you have to give way to on earth." I disagreed then and do still, though when the Commissioner was up to something he stole the show. One of my responsibilities in summer was to go with him to the beach where he swam daily until the second week in September. I was

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supposed to see that he didn't go out too far and also I handed him lighted cigarettes while he floated near the pier in the pillow striping of his suit with large belly, large old man's sex and yellow bald knees; his white back-hair spread on the water, yellowish, like polar bear's pelt, his vigorous fore-skull, tanned and red, turned up; while his big lips uttered and his nose drove out smoke, clever and pleasurable in the warm, heavy blue of Michigan; while wood-bracketed trawlers, tarred on the sides, chuffed and vapored outside the water reserved for the bawling, splashing, many-actioned, brilliant-colored crowd; waterside structures and towers, and skyscrapers beyond in a vast right angle to the evading bend of the shore.

Einhorn was the Commissioner's son by his first wife. By the second or third he had another son who was called Shep or, by his poolroom friends, Dingbat, for John Dingbat O'Berta the candy kid of city politics and friend of Polack Joe Saltis. Since he didn't either know or resemble O'Berta and wasn't connected with Thirteenth Ward politics or any other, I couldn't exactly say how he came by the name. But without being a hoodlum himself he was taken up with gang events and crime, a kind of amateur of the lore and done up in the gangster taste so you might take him for somebody tied up with the dangerous Druccis or Big Hayes Hubacek: sharp financial hat, body-clasping suit, the shirt Andalusian style buttoned up to the collar and worn without a necktie, trick shoes, pointed and pimpy, polished like a tango dancer's, clumped hard on the leather heels. Dingbat's hair was violent, brilliant, black, treated, ripple-marked. Bantam, thin-muscled, swift, almost frail, he had an absolutely unreasonable face. To be distinguished from brutal—it wasn't that, there was all kind of sentiment in it. But wild, down-twisting, squint-eyed, unchangeably firm and wrong in thoughts, with the prickles coming black through his unmethodical after-shave talcum; the puss of an executioner's subject, provided we understand the prototype not as a murderer (he attacked with his fists and had a killer's swing but not the real intention) but as somebody intractable. As far as that goes, he was beaten all the time and wore a mishealed scar where his cheek had been driven between his teeth by a ring, but he went on springing and boxing, rushing out from the poolroom on a fresh challenge to spin around on his tango shoes and throw his tense weightless punches. Being beaten didn't

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squelch him. I was by one Sunday when he picked a fight with that huge Five-Properties and thrust him on the chest with his hands, failing to move him; Five-Properties picked him up and threw him down on the floor. When Dingbat came back punching, Five-Properties grinned but was frightened and shied back against the cue-rack. Somebody in the crowd began to shout that Five-Properties was yellow and it was thought the right thing to hold Dingbat back, by the arms, struggling with a blinded drawn face of rage. A pal of his said what a shame that a veteran of Château-Thierry should be shoved around by a greenhorn. Five-Properties took it to heart and thereafter stayed away from the poolroom.

Dingbat had had charge of the poolroom at one time, but he was unreliable and the Commissioner had replaced him with a manager. Now he was around as the owner's son, racked up balls, once in a while changed color like a coal when a green table felt was ripped; and in the capacity of key-man and bravo, referee, bet-holder, sports expert and gang-war historian, on the watch for a small deal, a fighter to manage or a game of rotation at ten cents a ball. Between times he was his father's chauffeur. The Commissioner couldn't drive the big red Blackhawk-Stutz he owned—the Einhorns never could see anything in a small car—and Dingbat took him to the beach when it was too hot to walk. After all, the old man was pushing seventy-five and couldn't be allowed to risk a stroke. I'd ride with him in the back seat while Dingbat sat with mauled, crazy neck and a short grip on the wheel, ukelele and bathing suit on the cushion beside him; he was particularly sex-goaded when he drove, shouting, whistling and honking after quiff, to the entertainment of his father. Sometimes we had the company of Clem or Jimmy, or of Sylvester the movie bankrupt who was now flunking out of his engineer's course at Armour Tech and talking about moving away to New York altogether. On the beach, Dingbat, athletically braced up with belt and wristbands, a bandana to keep the sand out of his hair when he stood on his head, streaked down with suntan oil, was with a crowd of girls and other beach athletes, dancing and striking into his ukelele with

Ani-ka, hula wicki-wicki
Sweet brown maiden said to me,
And she taught me hula-hula
On the beach at Waikiki.

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Kindled enough, he made it suggestive, his black voice cracking, and his little roosterish flame licked up, clear, queer and crabbed. His old sire, gruff and mocking, deeply tickled, lay like the Buffalo Bill of the Etruscans in the beach-chair with the bath towel drawn up burnoose-wise to keep the dazzle from his eyes—additionally shaded by his soft, flesh-heavy arm—his bushy mouth open with laughter.

"Ee-*dyot!*" he cried to his son.

If the party began after the main heat of the day, William Einhorn might come down too, wheel-chair brought on the baggage rack of the Stutz, and his wife carrying an umbrella to shade them both. He was taken pick-a-back by his brother, or by me, from the office into the car, from the car to the right site of the lakeshore; all as distinguished, observing, white, untouched and nobiliare as a margrave. Quickeyes. Originally a big man, of the Commissioner's stature, well-formed, well-favored, he had more delicacy of spirit than the Commissioner, and of course Dingbat wasn't a patch on him. Einhorn was very pale, a little flabby in the face; he had considerable curvature of the nose, small lips, and graying hair let grow thickly so that it touched on the ears, and he was continually watchful, his look going forward uninterruptedly to fasten on subject matters. His heavy, attractive wife sat by him with the parasol, languorous, partly in smiles, with her free soft brown fist on her lap and strong hair bobbed with that declivity that you see in pictures of the Egyptian coif, the flat base forming a black brush about the back of the neck. Entertained by the summer breeziness, the little boats on the waves and the cavorting and minstrelsy.

If you want to know what she thought, it was that back home was locked, there were two pounds of hot dogs on the shelf of the gas range, two pounds of cold potatoes for salad, mustard, a rye bread already sliced. If she ran out, she could send me for more. Mrs. Einhorn liked to feel that things were ready. The old man would want tea. He needed to be pleased, and she was willing, asking only in return that he stop spitting on the floor, and that not of him directly, being too shy, but through her husband, to whom it was merely a joking matter. The rest of us would have coca cola, Einhorn's favorite drink. One of my daily chores was to fetch him cokes, in bottles from the poolroom or glasses from the drugstore, depending on which he judged to have the better mixture that day.

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My brother Simon, seeing me carry a glass on a tray through the gathering on the sidewalk—there was always an overflow of businessmen before Einhorn's mixing with the mourners from Kinsman's chapel and the poolroom characters—gave a big laugh of surprise and said, "So this is your job. You're the butler."

But it was only one function of hundreds, some even more menial and personal, but others calling for cleverness and training—secretary, deputy, agent, companion. He was a man who needed someone beside him continually; the things that had to be done for him made him autocratic. At Versailles or in Paris the Sun King had one nobleman to hand him his stockings, another his shirt, in his morning levee. Einhorn had to be lifted up in bed and dressed. Now and then it was I who had to do it. The room was dark and unfresh, for he and his wife slept with the windows shut. So it was sleep rank from nights of both bodies. I see I had no sense of criticism about such things; I got used to it quickly. Einhorn was in his underwear because changing to pajamas was a task, and he and his wife kept late hours. Thus, the light switched on, there was Einhorn in his bvds, wasted arms freckled, grizzled hair afly from his face that was inclined to flatness, the shrewd curved nose and clipped mustache. If peevish, and sometimes he was, my cue was to be quiet until he got back his spirits. It was against policy to be out of temper in the morning. He preferred to be jocular. Birdy, teasing, often corny or lewd, he guyed his wife about the noise and bother she made getting breakfast. In dressing him, my experience with George was useful, but there was more style about Einhorn than I was used to. His socks were of grand silk, trousers with a banker's stripe; he had several pairs of shoes, fine Walkovers that of course never wrinkled below the instep, much less wore out, a belt with a gothic monogram. Dressed to the waist, he was lifted into his black leather chair and pulled on quakey wheels to the bathroom. At times the first settling in the chair drew a frown from him, sometimes a more oblique look of empoisoned acceptance; but mostly it was a stoical operation. I eased him down and took him, traveling backwards, to the toilet, a sunny room with an east window to the yard. The Commissioner and Einhorn, both rather careless in their habits, made this a difficult place to keep clean. But for people of some nobility, allowances have always been made in this regard.

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I understand that British aristocrats are still legally entitled to piss, if they should care to, on the hind wheels of carriages.

There wasn't anything Mrs. Einhorn could do about the wet floor. Once in a while when Bavatsky the handyman was gone too long in Polack Town or drunk in the cellar, she asked me to clean up. She said she didn't like to impose on me because I was a student. Nevertheless I was getting paid. For unspecified work of a mixed character. I accepted it as such; the mixed character of it was one of the things I liked. I was just as varietistic and unfit for discipline and regularity as my friend Clem Tambow; only I differed from Clem in being a beaver, once my heart was attached to a work or a cause. Naturally, when Einhorn found this out, and he quickly did, he kept me going steadily; it suited him perfectly because of the great number of things he had to be done. Should he run out, my standing by made him invent more. So I didn't often get the toilet detail; he had too many important tasks for me. And when I did get it, why, what I had had under Grandma Lausch made an inconsiderable thing of it to be porter for an hour.

But now in the toilet with Einhorn: he kept me by him to read the morning headlines from the *Examiner,* the financial news, closing quotations from Wall Street and La Salle Street. Local news, next, something about Big Bill Thompson, that he had hired the Cort Theater, for instance, and presented himself on the stage with two caged giant rats from the stockyards whom he addressed by the names of Republican renegades—I came to know what items Einhorn would want first. "Yes, it's just as Thompson says. He's a big gasbag, but this time it's true. He rushed back from Honolulu to save what's-his-name from the penitentiary." He was long and well-nigh perfect of memory, a close and detailed reader of the news and kept a file on matters of interest to him, for he was highly systematic, and one of my jobs was to see that his files were in order in the long steel and wood cases he surrounded himself with. That wasn't always easy as he was masterful, and often fussy for reasons hard to understand when I placed something before him, proposing to throw it away. The stuff had to be where he could lay his hands on it at once, his clippings and pieces of paper, in folders labeled Commerce, Invention, Major Local Transactions, Crime and Gang, Democrats, Republicans, Archaeology, Literature, League of Nations.

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Search me, why the League of Nations, but he lived by Baconian ideas of what makes the man this and that, and had a weakness for complete information. Everything was going to be properly done, with Einhorn, and was thoroughly organized on his desk and about it—Shakespeare, Bible, Plutarch, dictionary and thesaurus, *Commercial Law for Laymen,* real-estate and insurance guides, almanacs and directories; then typewriter in black hood, dictaphone, telephones on bracket arms and a little screwdriver to hand for touching off the part of the telephone mechanism that registered the drop of the nickel—for even at his most prosperous Einhorn wasn't going to pay for every call he made; the company was raking in a fortune from the coin boxes used by the other businessmen who came to the office—, wire trays labeled Incoming and Outgoing, molten Etna weights, notary's seal on a chain, staplers, flap-moistening sponges, keys to money, confidential papers, to notes, condoms, personal correspondence and poems and essays. When all this was arranged and in place, all proper, he could begin to operate, back of his polished barrier approached by two office gates, where he was one of the chiefs of life, a white-faced executive, much aware of himself and even of the freakish willful shrewdness that sometimes spoiled his dignity and proud, plaque-like good looks.

He had his father to keep up with, whose business ideas were perhaps less imaginative but broader, based on his connections with his rich old-time cronies. The old Commissioner had made the Einhorn money and still kept the greater part of the titles in his name, not because he didn't trust his son but only for the reason that to the business community he was *the* Einhorn, the one who was approached first with deals and offers. William was the heir and was also to be trustee for his son Arthur, who was a sophomore at the University of Illinois, and for Dingbat. Sometimes Einhorn was unhappy about the Commissioner's habit of making private loans, some of them sizable, from the bankroll he carried pinned inside the pocket of his Mark Twain suit. But he bragged about him as a pioneer builder on the Northwest Side and had dynastic ideas about the Einhorns—the organizer coming after the conqueror, the poet and philosopher succeeding the organizer, and the whole development typically American, the work of intelligence and strength in an open field, a world of possibilities. But really, with all respect for the Com-

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missioner, Einhorn, while still fresh and palmy, felt that he had his father's overriding powers plus something else, statesmanship, fineness of line, Parsee sense, deep-dug intrigue, the scorn of the sixth of the popes named Alexander for custom. One morning while I was reading from a column on the misconduct of an American heiress with an Italian prince at Cannes, he stopped me to quote: " 'Dear Kate, you and I cannot be confined within the weak list of a country's fashion. We are the makers of manners, Kate, and the liberty that follows our places stops the mouths of all find-faults. . . .' That's Henry V for you. Meaning that there's one way for people at large and another for those that have something special to do. Which those at large have to have in front of them. It braces them up that there's a privilege they can't enjoy, as long as they know it's there. Besides, there's law, and then there's Nature. There's opinion, and then there's Nature. Somebody has to get outside of law and opinion and speak for Nature. It's even a public duty, so customs won't have us all by the windpipe." Einhorn had a teaching turn similar to Grandma Lausch's, both believing they could show what could be done with the world, pointing out where it gave or resisted, where you could be confident and run or where you could only feel your way and were forced to blunder. And with his son at the University, I was the only student he had to hand.

He put on a judicious head, and things had to be collared and brought to a standstill when he was ready to give out. He raised his unusable arms to the desk by a neat trick that went through several stages, tugging the sleeve of the right with the fingers of the left, helping on the left with the right. There wasn't any appeal to feelings, as he accomplished this; it was only an operation. But it had immense importance. As a robust, full-blooded man might mount up to a pulpit and then confess his weakness before God, Einhorn, with his feebleness demonstrated for a preliminary, got himself situated to speak of strength, with strength. It was plenty queer to hear him on this note, especially in view of the daily drift of life here.

But let's take it back to the toilet, where Einhorn got himself ready in the morning. At one time he used to have the barber in to shave him. But this reminded him too much of the hospital, he said, where he had put in a total of two and a half years. Besides he

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preferred to do things for himself as much as possible; he had to rely on too many people as it was. So now he used a safety razor stropped in a gadget a Czech inventor had personally sold him; he swore by it. To shave took better than half an hour, chin on the edge of the sink and hands in the water, working round his face. He fished for the washrag, muffled himself in it; I could hear him exhale through its papillae. He soaped, rubbed and played, scraped, explored with fingers for patches of bristle, and I sat on the cover of the pot and read. The vapor woke up old smells and there was something astringent in the shaving cream he used that cut into my breath. Then he pomaded his wet hair and slipped on a little cap made of an end of woman's hose. Dried and powdered, he had to be helped into his shirt, his tie put on—the knot inspected many times by his fingers and warped exactly into place with some nervousness about the top button. The jacket, next, finished off dryly with the whiskbroom. Fly re-examined, shoes wiped of water drops, we were all set and I got the nod to draw him into the kitchen for breakfast.

His appetite was sharp and he crowded his food. A smart stranger, unaware that Einhorn was paralyzed, would have guessed he was not a well man from seeing him suck a pierced egg, for it was something humanly foxy, paw-handled, hungry above average need. Then he had this cap of a woman's stocking, like a trophy for another field of appetites, if you'll excuse a sporting reference, or martial one, on his head. He was conscious of this himself, for pretty much everything was thought of and his mind in its way performed admirable work with many of the things he did; or did not care to stop himself from doing; or was not able to stop; or thought it only creaturely human nature to do; or enjoyed, indulged, was proud his disease had not killed his capacity for but rather left him with more than many normal men. Much that's nameless to many people through disgust or shame of it he didn't mind naming to himself or to a full confidant (or pretty nearly so) like me, and he used and worked all freely. There was plenty to be in on; he was a very busy man.

There was a short executive period, after coffee, when Einhorn turned his attention to household matters. Wrinkled, gloomy, Tiny Bavatsky, string-muscled, was fetched up from the basement and

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told what he must do, warned to lay off the bottle till night. He went away, hitch-gaited, talking to himself in words of menace, to start his tasks. Mrs. Einhorn really was not a good housekeeper even though she complained about the floor of the toilet or the old man's spitting. But Einhorn was a thoughtful proprietor and saw to it that everything was kept humming, running, flushing and constantly improved—rats killed, cement laid in the backyard, machines cleaned and oiled, porches retimbered, tenants sanitary, garbage cans covered, screens patched, flies sprayed. He was able to tell you how fast pests multiplied, how much putty to buy for a piece of glazing, the right prices of nails or clothesline or fuses and many such things; as much as any ancient senator knew of husbandry before such concerns came to be thought wrong. Then, when everything was under control, he had himself taken into his office on the specially constructed chair with cackly castors. I had to dust the desk and get him a coke to drink with his second cigarette, and he was already on his mail when I got back. His mail was large—he had to have a lot of it, and from many kinds of correspondents in all parts of the country.

Let it be hot—for I'm reporting on summers, during vacations, when I spent full time with him—and he was wearing his vest in the office. The morning, this early, was often gentle prairie weather, long before the rugged grind; it was like the naivety you get to expect in the hardest, toughest-used people when you've been with them long enough. I refer to business and heat of a Chicago summer afternoon. But it was breathing-time. The Commissioner hadn't finished dressing yet; he went into the mild sun of the street in his slippers; his galluses hung down, and the smoke of his Claro passed up and back above his white hair, while his hand was sunk comfortable and deep below his waistband. And Einhorn, away back, the length of the office, slit open his letters, made notes for replies, dipped into his files or passed things on for me to check on—me, the often stumped aide, trying to get straight what he was up to in his numerous small swindles. In this respect there was hardly anything he didn't get into, like ordering things on approval he didn't intend to pay for—stamps, little tubes of lilac perfume, packages of linen sachet, Japanese paper roses that opened in water and all the sort of items advertised in the back pages of the Sunday supplement.

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He had me write for them in my hand and give fictitious names, and he threw away the dunning letters, of course, and said all of these people calculated losses into what they charged. He sent away for everything that was free—samples of food, soaps, medicine, the literature of all causes, reports of the Bureau of American Ethnology and publications of the Smithsonian Institute, the Bishop Museum in Hawaii, the Congressional Record, laws, prospectuses, college catalogues, quack hygiene books, advice on bust-development, on getting rid of pimples, on longevity and Coué-ism, pamphlets on Fletcherism, Yoga, spirit-rapping, anti-vivisection; he was on the mailing list of the Henry George Institute and the Rudolf Steiner Foundation in London, the Bar Association, the American Legion. He had to be in touch with everything. And all this material he kept; the overflow went down to the basement. Bavatsky or I, or Lollie Fewter who came in three days a week to do the ironing, carried it below. Some of it, when it went out of print, he sold to bookstores or libraries, and some he remailed to his clients with the Einhorn stamp on it, for goodwill. He had much to do also with contests and entered every competition he got wind of, suggesting names for new products, slogans; he made up bright sayings and most embarrassing moments, most delightful dreams, omens he should have heeded, telepathic experiences and jingles.

When radio first appeared, I did rave,
And all my pennies I did save,
Even neglected to shave.
I'll take my dear Dynamic to the grave.

He won the *Evening American's* first prize of five dollars with this, and one of my jobs was to see that what was sent out to contests, anagrams on the names of Presidents or on the capitals of states, or elephants composed of tiny numbers (making what sum?), that these entries were neat, mounted right, inside ruled borders, accompanied by the necessary coupons, box-tops and labels. Furthermore, I had to do reference work for him in his study or at the library downtown, one of his projects being to put out an edition of Shakespeare indexed as the Gideon Bible was: Slack Business, Bad Weather, Difficult Customers, Stuck with Big Inventory of Last Year's Models, Woman, Marriage, Partners. One thousand and one catchpenny deals, no order too big, no sum too small. And, all the

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time, talkative, clowning, classical, philosophical, homiletic, corny, passing around French poses and imitation turds from the Clark Street novelty stores, pornographic Katzenjammers and Somebody's Stenog, teasing with young Lollie Fewter who was fresh up from the coal-fields, that girl with her green eyes from which she didn't try to keep the hotness, and her freckled bust presented to the gathering of men she came among with her waxing rags and the soft shake of her gait. Yea, Einhorn, careful of his perch, with dead legs, and yet denying in your teeth he was different from other men. He never minded talking about his paralysis; on the contrary, sometimes he would boast of it as a thing he had overcome, in the manner of a successful businessman who tells you of the farm poverty of his boyhood. Nor did he overlook any chance to exploit it. To a mailing list got together from houses that sold wheel-chairs, braces and appliances, he sent out a mimeographed paper called *The Shut-In*. Two pages of notices and essays, sentimental bits cribbed from *Elbert Hubbard's Scrapbook*, tags from *Thanatopsis*. . . . "Not like the slave scourged to his quarry" but like a noble, stoical Greek; or from Whittier: "Prince thou art, the grown up man/Only is Republican," and other such sources. "Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul!" The third page was reserved for readers' letters. This thing—I put it out on the mimeograph and stapled and carried it to the post office—gave me the creeps once in a while, uneasy flesh around the neck. But he spoke of it as a service to shut-ins. It was a help to him as well; it brought in considerable insurance business, for he signed himself, "William Einhorn, a neighborhood broker," and various companies paid the costs. Like Grandma Lausch again, he knew how to use large institutions. He had an important bearing with their representatives—clabber-faced, with his intelligent bit of mustache and shrewd action of his dark eyes, chicken-winged arms at rest. On which he wore sleeve-garters—another piece of feminine apparel. He tried to maneuver various insurance companies into competitive bidding to increase his commissions.

Many repeated pressures with the same effect as one strong blow, that was his method, he said, and it was his great pride that he knew how to use the means contributed by the age to connive as ably as anyone else; when in a not so advanced time he'd have been mummy-handled in a hut or somebody might have had to

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help him be a beggar in front of a church, the next thing to a *memento mori* or, more awful, a reminder of what difficulties there were before you could even become dead. Whereas now—well, it was probably no accident that it was the cripple Hephaestus who made ingenious machines; a normal man didn't have to hoist or jack himself over hindrances by means of cranks, chains and metal parts. Then it was in the line of human advance, that Einhorn could do so much; especially since the whole race was so hopped-up about appliances, he was not a hell of a lot more dependent than others who couldn't make do without this or that commodity, engine, gizmo, sliding door, public service. He said that this being relieved of small toils made mind the chief center of trial, as it should be. Find Einhorn in a serious mood when his fatty, beaky, noble Bourbon face was thoughtful, and he'd give you the lowdown on the mechanical age, and on strength and frailty, and piece it out with little digressions on the history of cripples—the dumbness of the Spartans, the fact that Oedipus was lame, that gods were often maimed, that Moses had faltering speech and Dmitri the Sorcerer a withered arm, Caesar and Mahomet epilepsy, Lord Nelson a pinned sleeve—but especially on the machine age and the kind of advantage that had to be taken of it; with me like a man-at-arms receiving a lecture from the learned *signor* who felt like passing out discourse.

I was a listener by upbringing. And Einhorn with his graces, learning, oratory and register of effects was not after influencing me practically. He was not like Grandma, with her educational seventy-fives trained on us. He wanted to flow along, be admirable and eloquent. Not fatherly. I wasn't ever to get it into my head that I was part of the family. There wasn't much chance that I would, the way Arthur, the only son, figured in their references, and I was sent out when any big family deal began to throb around. To make absolutely sure I wouldn't have any such notions, Einhorn would now and then ask me some question about my people, as if he hadn't informed himself through Coblin, Kreines, Clem and Jimmy. Pretty clever, he was, to place me this way. If Grandma had had ideas about a wealthy man who might take a fancy to us and make our fortune, Simon's and mine, Einhorn had corresponding ideas. I wasn't to think because we were intimately connected and because he liked me that I was going to get into the will. The things that

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had to be done for him were such that anybody who worked for him was necessarily intimate with him. It sometimes got my goat, he and Mrs. Einhorn made so sure I knew my place. But maybe they were right; the old woman had implanted the thought, though I never entertained it in earnest. However there *was* such a thought and it bulged somewhat into my indignation. Einhorn and his wife were selfish. They weren't mean, I admitted in fairness, and generally I could be fair about it; merely selfish, like two people enjoying their lunch on the grass and not asking you to join them. If you weren't dying for a sandwich yourself it could even make a pleasant picture, smacking on the mustard, cutting cake, peeling eggs and cucumbers. Selfish Einhorn was, nevertheless; his nose in constant action smelled, and smelled out everything, sometimes austerely, or again without manners, covert, half an eye out for observers but not to be deterred if there were any, either.

I don't think I would have considered myself even remotely as a legatee of the Commissioner if they hadn't, for one thing, underlined my remoteness from inheritance and, for another, discussed inheritances all the time.

Well, they were steeped and soaked necessarily in insurance and property, lawsuits and legal miscarriages, sour partnerships and welchings and contested wills. This was what you heard when the connoisseur's club of weighty cronies met, who all showed by established marks—rings, cigars, quality of socks, newness of panamas—where they were situated; they were classified, too, in grades of luck and wisdom, darkness by birth or vexations, power over or subjection to wives, women, sons and daughters, grades of disfigurement; or by the roles they played in comedies, tragedies, sex farces; whether they screwed or were screwed, whether they themselves did the manipulating or were roughly handled, tugged and bobbled by their fates; they were classified according to their frauds, their smart bankruptcies, the fires they had set; by what were their prospects of life, how far death stood from them. Also their merits: which heavy of fifty was a good boy, a donor, a friend, a compassionate man, a man of balls, a lucid percentage calculator, a fellow willing to make a loan of charity though he couldn't sign his name, a giver of scrolls to the synagogue, a protector of Polish relatives. It was known; Einhorn had it all noted. And apparently everybody knew

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everything. There was a good circulation of frankness and a lot of respect going back and forth. Also a lot of despicable things. Be this as it might, the topic inside the railed space of benches or at the pinochle game in the side office annex, was mostly business—receiverships, amortizations, wills and practically nothing else. As rigor is the theme of Labrador, breathing of the summits of the Andes, space to the Cornish miner who lies in a seam under the sea. And, on the walls, insurance posters of people in the despair of fire-traps and the undermining of rats in the beams, housewives bringing down the pantry shelves in their fall. Which all goes to show how you couldn't avoid the question of inheritances. Was the old Commissioner fond of me? While Mrs. Einhorn was a kindly woman ordinarily, now and again she gave me a glance that suggested Sarah and the son of Hagar. Notwithstanding that there was nothing to worry about. Nothing. I wasn't of the blood, and the old man had dynastic ideas, too. And I wasn't trying to worm my way into any legacy and get any part of what was coming to her son Arthur. Sure the old man was fond of me; he stroked my shoulder, gave me tips and thought of me no further.

But he and Einhorn were an enigma to Tillie. Her pharaoh-bobbed hair grew out of a head mostly physically endowed; she couldn't ever tell what they might take it into their minds to do. And especially her husband, he was so supple, fertile and changeable. She worshipfully obeyed him and did his biddings and errands just as the rest of us did. He'd send her to City Hall with requests for information from the Recorder's office or the license bureau; he wrote notes, because she could never explain what he wanted and she brought back the information written out by a clerk. To get her out of the way when he was up to something, he sent her to visit her brother on the South Side, an all-day junket on the streetcars. To be sure she'd be good and gone; and what's more, she knew it.

But now suppose we're at lunchtime, in Einhorn's specimen day. Mrs. Einhorn didn't like to bother in the kitchen and favored ready-made or easy meals, delicatessen, canned salmon with onion and vinegar, or hamburger and fried potatoes. And these hamburgers weren't the flat lunch-wagon jobs, eked out with cornmeal, but big pieces of meat souped up with plenty of garlic and fried to blackness. Covered with horse-radish and chili sauce, they didn't go

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down so hard. This was the food of the house, in the system of its normalcy like its odors and furnishings, and if you were the visiting albatross come to light, you'd eat the food you ne'er had eat and offer no gripe. The Commissioner, Einhorn and Dingbat asked no questions about it but ate a great deal, with tea or coca cola as usual. Then Einhorn took a white spoonful of Bisodol and a glass of Waukesha water for his gas. He made a joke of it but he never forgot to take them and heeded all his processes with much seriousness, careful that his tongue was not too coated and his machinery smooth. Very grave, he was sometimes, when he acted as his own physician. He liked to say that he was fatal to doctors, especially to those who had never given him much hope. "I buried two of them," he said. "Each one told me I'd be gone in a year, and before the year was out he croaked." It made him feel good to tell other doctors of this. Still, he was zealous about taking care of himself; and with this zeal he had a brat's self-mockery about the object of his cares, bottomless self-ribbing; he let his tongue droop over his lip, comic and stupid, and made dizzy crosses with his eyes. Nevertheless, he was always thinking about his health and took his powders and iron and liver pills. You might almost say he followed assimilation with his thoughts; all through his body that death had already moved in on, to the Washington of his brain, to his sex and studying eyes. Ah, sure, he was still a going concern, very much so, but he had to take thought more than others did about themselves, since if *he* went wrong he was a total loss, nowise justified, a dead account, a basket case, an encumbrance, zero. I knew this because he expressed everything and though he wouldn't talk openly about the money he had in the bank or the property he owned, he was absolutely outspoken about vital things and he'd open his mind to me, especially when we were together in his study and busy with one of his projects that got more fanciful and muddled the more notions he had about being systematic, so that in the end there'd be a super monstrous apparatus you couldn't set in motion either by push or crank.

"Augie, you know another man in my position might be out of life for good. There's a view of man anyhow that he's only a sack of craving guts; you find it in Hamlet, as much as you want of it. What a piece of work is a man, and the firmament fretted with

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gold . . . but the whole *gescheft* bores him. Look at me, I'm not even express and admirable in action. You could say a man like me ought to be expected to lie down and quit the picture. Instead, I'm running a big business today—." That was not the pure truth; it was the Commissioner who was still the big wheel, but it wasn't uninteresting all the same. "—While nobody would blame me for rotting in the back room under a blanket or for crabbing and blabbing my bitter heart out, with fresh and healthy people going around me so as not to look. A kid like you, for instance, strong as a bronco and rosy as an apple. An Alcibiades beloved-of-man, by Jesus. I don't know what brain power you've got; you're too frisky yet, and even if you turn out to be smart you'll never be in the class of my son Arthur. You shouldn't be angry for hearing the truth, if you're lucky enough to find somebody to hear it from. Anyhow, you're not bad off, being an Alcibiades. That's already way and above your fellow creatures. And don't think they didn't hate the original, either. All but Socrates himself, ugly as an old dog, they tell us. Nor just because the young fellow knocked the dongs of the holy figures off, supposedly, before he shipped for Sicily. But to get back to the subject, it's one thing to be buried with all your pleasures, like Sardanapalus; it's another to be buried right plunk in front of them, where you can see them. Ain't it so? You need a genius to raise you above it. . . ."

Quiet, quiet, quiet afternoon in the backroom study, with an oilcloth on the library table, busts on the wall, invisible cars snoring and trembling toward the park, the sun shining into the yard outside the window barred against housebreakers, billiard balls kissing and bounding on the felt and sponge rubber, and the undertaker's back door still and stiller, cats sitting on the paths in the Lutheran gardens over the alley that were swept and garnished and scarcely ever trod by the chin-tied Danish deaconesses who'd come out on the cradle-ribbed and always fresh-painted porches of their home.

Somewhat it stung me, the way he compared me with his son. But I didn't mind being Alcibiades, and let him be in the same bracket with Socrates in the bargain, since that was what he was driving at. We had title just as good as the chain-mail English kings had to Brutus. If you want to pick your own ideal creature in the mirror coastal air and sharp leaves of ancient perfections and be at

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home where a great mankind was at home, I've never seen any reason why not. Though unable to go along one hundred per cent with a man like the Reverend Beecher telling his congregation, "Ye are Gods, you are crystalline, your faces are radiant!" I'm not an optimist of that degree, from the actual faces, congregated or separate, that I've seen; always admitting that the true vision of things is a gift, particularly in times of special disfigurement and worldwide Babylonishness, when plug-ugly macadam and volcanic peperino look commoner than crystal—to eyes with an ordinary amount of grace, anyhow—and when it appears like a good sensible policy to settle for medium grade quartz. I wonder where in the creation there would be much of a double-take at the cry *"Homo Sum!"* But I was and have always been ready to venture as far as possible; even though I was never as much imposed on by Einhorn as he wanted me to be in his big moments, with his banker's trousers and chancellor's cravat, and his unemployable squiggle feet on the barber-chair-like mount of his wheeled contraption made to his specifications. And I never could decide whether he meant that he was a genius or had one; I suppose he wanted there should be some doubt about the meaning. He wasn't the man to come out and declare that he wasn't a genius while there was the chance he might be one, a thing like that coming about *nolens volens*. To some, like his half-brother Dingbat, he was one. Dingbat swore up and down, "Willie is a wizard. Give him two bits worth of telephone slugs and he'll parley it into big dough." His wife agreed, too, without reservations that Einhorn was a wizard. Anything he did—and that covers a lot of territory—was all right with her. There wasn't any higher authority, not even her brother Karas who ran the Holloway Enterprises and Management Company and was a demon money-maker himself. Karas, that bad, rank character, cinder-crawed, wise to all angles, dressed to kill, with a kitty-cornered little smile and extortionist's eyes, she was in awe of him also, but he wasn't presumed to be in Einhorn's class.

But Einhorn wasn't exactly buried in front of his pleasures. He carried on with one woman or another and, in particular, he had a great need of girls like Lollie Fewter. His explanation was that he took after his father. The Commissioner, in a kindly, sleepy, warm-aired, fascinated way, petted and admired all women, and put his hands

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wherever he liked. I imagine women weren't very angry when he saluted them in this style because he picked out whatever each of them herself prized most—breasts, hair, hips, legs and all the little secrets and connivances with which she emphasized her own good things. You couldn't rightly say it was a common letch he had; it was a sort of Solomonic regard of an old chief. With his spotty big old hands, he felt up the married and the unmarried ones, and even the little girls for what they promised, and nobody ever was offended by it or by the names he gave, names like "The Tangerines," or "The Little Sled," "Madame Yesteryear," "The Six-Foot Dove." The grand old gentleman. Satisfied and gratified. You could feel from the net pleasantness he carried what there had been between him and women now old or dead whom he recognized, probably, and greeted in these different people.

His sons didn't share this quality. Of course you don't expect younger men to have this kind of evening-Mississippi serenity, but there wasn't much disinterestedness or contemplation in either of them. There was perhaps more of it in Dingbat than in his brother. There scarcely was a time when Dingbat wasn't engaged to a nice girl. He scrubbed himself and dressed himself to go to see her in a desperate, cracked rage of earnest respect. Sometimes he would look ready to cry from devotion, and in his preparations he ran out of the perfumed bathroom, clean starched shirt open on his skinny hairiness, to remind me to fetch the corsage from Bluegren's. He could never do enough for these girls and never thought himself good enough for them. And the more he respected them the more he ran with tramps he picked up at Guyon's Paradise and took to the Forest Preserves in the Stutz, or to a little Wilson Avenue hotel that Karas-Holloway owned. But Friday evenings, at family dinner, there was often a fiancée, now a piano teacher, now a dress designer or bookkeeper, or simply a home girl, wearing an engagement ring and other presents; and Dingbat with a necktie, tense and daffy, homagefully calling her "Honey," "Isabel, hon," "Janice, dear," in his hoarse, thin, black voice.

Einhorn, however, didn't have such sentiments at all, whatever sentiments he entertained about different things. He took the joking liberties his father did, but the jokes didn't have the same ring; which isn't to say that they weren't funny but that he cast himself forward

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on them toward a goal—seduction. When he kidded and laughed, the laugh was about his disability; he was explaining it, and he was not so secretly saying to women that if they'd look further they'd find to their surprise that there was the real thing, not disabled. He promised. So that when he worked his wicked charm, apparently so safe, like a worldly priest or elderly gentleman from whom it's safe to accept a little complimentary badinage or tickle, he was really single-mindedly and grimly fixed on the one thing, ultimately *the* thing that brought men and women together. And he was the same with them all, not, of course, foreseeing any great success, but hoping all the same that one of them—beautiful, forward, intrigued with him, wishing to play a secret game, maybe a trifle perverse (he suggested)—would see, would grasp, would crave, burn for him. He looked and hoped for this in every woman.

He wouldn't stay a cripple, Einhorn; he couldn't hold his soul in it. Sometimes it was dreadful, this; he'd lose everything he'd thought through uncountable times to reconcile himself to it, and be like the wolf in the pit in the zoo who keeps putting his muzzle to the corners of the walls, back and forth in his exhibition jail. It didn't happen often; probably not oftener than ordinary people get a shove of the demon. But it happened. On one of those days when he was off his feed, or had a cold and a little fever, or when there was a rift in the organization or his position didn't feel so eminent and he wasn't getting the volume of homages and mail he needed, or when it was the turn of a feared truth to come up unseen through the multitude of elements out of which he composed his life, you'd see it come upon him. And then he'd say:

"I used to think I'd either walk or swallow iodine, and I'd have massages and take exercises, and do drills when I'd concentrate on a single muscle and think I was building it up by my will, and it was all the bunk, Augie, all the Coué theories, etcetera. For the birds. And *It Can Be Done* and that sort of stuff that big-shot Teddy Roosevelt wrote in his books. Nobody'll ever know all the things I tried before I finally decided it was no go. I couldn't take it, and I took it. And I *can't* take it, but yet I do take it. But how! You can get along twenty-nine days with your trouble, but there's always that thirtieth day when God damn it you can't, when you feel like the stinking fly in the first cold-snap, when you look about and

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think you're the Old Man of the Sea locked around Sindbad's neck; and why should anybody carry an envious piece of human junk? If society had any sense they'd give me euthanasia or leave me the way the Eskimos do their old folks in an igloo with food for two days. Don't you look so miserable. Go on away. See if Tillie wants you for something."

But this was on the thirtieth day, or more seldom, because in general he enjoyed good health and looked on himself as a useful citizen and even an extraordinary one, and he bragged that there was hardly anything he couldn't bring off if he put his mind to it. And he certainly did some bang-up things. He'd clear us all out of the way to be alone with Lollie Fewter; he'd arrange for the whole lot of us to drive out to Niles Center and show the Commissioner a piece of property. Ostensibly getting ready to occupy himself with a piece of work while we were away—the files and information were laid out for him—he was unhurried, engaging and smooth-tempered in his tortoise-shells, answering every last question in full and even detaining the excursion to have some last words with his father about frontages, or improvements. "Wait till I show you on the map just where the feeder-bus comes through. Bring the map, Augie." He'd have me fetch it and kept the Commissioner till he became impatient, with Dingbat grinding the klaxon and Mrs. Einhorn already settled with bags of fruit in the back seat, calling, "Come, it's hot. I'm fainting here." And Lollie in the passage between the flat and the offices sauntered up and down with the dust mop in the polished dimness, big and soft, comfortable for the heat in a thin blouse and straw sandals, like an overgrown girl walking a doll and keeping a smile to herself about this maternal, matrimonial game, lazy and careless and, you could say, saving force for the game to follow. Clem Tambow had tried to tell me what the score was but hadn't convinced me, not just because of the oddness of the idea, and that I had a boyish respect for Einhorn, but also because I had made a start with Lollie myself. I found excuses to be with her in the kitchen while she was ironing. She told me of her family in the Franklin County coal-fields, and then about the men there, and what they tried and did. She rolled me in feelings. From suggestion alone, I didn't have the strength to keep my feet. We soon were kissing and feeling; she now held off my hands and now led them inside her dress,

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alleging instruction, boisterous that I was still cherry and at last, from kindness, she one day said that if I'd come back in the evening I could take her home. She left me so horny I was scarcely able to walk. I hid out in the poolroom, dreading that Einhorn would send for me. But Clem came with a message from her that she had changed her mind. I was bitter about that but I reckon I felt freed, too, from a crisis. "Didn't I tell you?" said Clem. "You both work for the same boss, and she's his little nooky. His and a couple of other guys'. But not for you. You don't know anything and you don't have any money."

"Why, damn her soul!"

"Well, Einhorn would give her anything. He's nuts about her."

I couldn't conceive that. It wouldn't be like Einhorn to settle his important feelings on a tramp. But that exactly was what he had done. He was mad for her. Einhorn knew, too, that he shared her with a few hoodlums from the poolroom. Of course he knew. It wasn't in his life to be without information; he had the stowage of an anthill for it, with weaving black lines of approvisioners creeping into the crest from every direction. They told him what would be the next turn in the Lingle case, or what the public auction schedule would be, or about appellate court decisions before they were in print and where there was hot goods, from furs to school supplies; so he had a line on Lollie from the beginning to the end.

Eleanor Klein asked me sentimental questions. Did I have a sweetheart yet? It was a thing I appeared ripe for. Our old neighbor, Kreines, asked me too, but in a different way, and on the q.t. He judged I was no longer a kid and he could reveal himself, his cock-eyes turning fierce and gay. *"Schmeist du schon,* August? You've got friends? Not my son. He comes home from the store and reads the paper. *S'interesiert ihm nicht.* You're not too young are you? I was younger than you and *gefährlich.* I couldn't get enough. Kotzie doesn't take after me. . . ." He much needed to pronounce himself the better and in fact the only man in his house; and he did look very sturdy when he massed up his teeth and creased his out-of-doors, rugged face to smile. He saw a lot of weather, for he went through the entire West Side on foot with his satchel of samples. Because he had to count every nickel. And he had the patience and hardness of steady pavement going that passes the

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same lead-whited windows of a factory twenty times a month, and he knew every empty lot between him and a destination. Arriving, he could hang around hours for a six-bit commission or a piece of information. "Kotzie takes after my missis," he said. "He is *kaltblutig.*" Sure I knew it was he himself that did all the trumpeting, screaming and stamping down in his flat, throwing things on the floor.

"And how is your brother?" he said intriguingly. "I understand the little *maidelech* wet their pants for him. What is he doing?"

As a matter of fact I didn't know what Simon was up to these days. He didn't tell me, nor did he seem curious as to what was happening to me, having decided in his mind that I was nothing but a handyman at Einhorn's.

Once I went with Dingbat to a party one of his fiancées was giving and I met my brother with a Polish girl in a fur-trimmed orange dress; he wore a big, smooth, check suit and looked handsome and sufficient to himself. He didn't stay long, and I had a feeling that he didn't want to spend his evenings where I did. Or maybe it was the kind of evening Dingbat made of it that didn't please him, Dingbat's recitations and hoarse parodies, his turkey girding and obscene cackles that made the girls scream.

There were several months when Dingbat and I were very thick. At parties I horsed around with him, goofy, his straight-man; or I hugged and pitched on the porches and in backyards with girls, exactly as he did. He took me under his protection in the poolroom and we did some friendly boxing, at which I was never much good, and played snooker—a little better—and hung about there with the hoods and loudmouths. So that Grandma Lausch would have thought that the very worst she had ever said about me let me off too light, seeing me in the shoeshine seat above the green tables, in a hat with diamond air holes cut in it and decorated with brass kiss-me pins and Al Smith buttons, in sneakers and Mohawk sweat shirt, there in the frying jazz and the buzz of baseball broadcasts, the click of markers, butt thumping of cues, the spat-down polly-seed shells and blue chalk crushed underfoot and dust of hand-slickening talcum hanging in the air. Along with the blood-smelling swaggeroos, recruits for mobs, automobile thieves, stick-up men, sluggers and bouncers, punks with ambition to become torpedoes,

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neighborhood cowboys with Jack Holt sideburns down to the jawbone, collegiates, tin-horns and small-time racketeers and pugs, ex-servicemen, home-evading husbands, hackies, truckers and bush-league athletes. Whenever someone had a notion to work out on me—and there were plenty of touchy characters here to catch your eye in a misconstrued way—Dingbat flew around to protect me.

"This kid is a buddy of mine and he works for my bro. Monkey with him and you'll get something broke on your head. What's the matter, you tough or hungry!"

He was never anything but through and through earnest when the subject was loyalty; his bony dukes were ready and his Cuban heels dug down sharply; his furrowed chin was already feeling toward fighting position on the shoulder of his starched white shirt; he prepared to go into his stamping dance and start slugging.

But there weren't any fights over me. If there was one doctrine of Grandma Lausch's that went home, it was the one of the soft answer, though with her this was of tactical not merciful origin, the dust-off for heathen, stupes and brute-heads. So I don't claim it was a trained spirit turning aside wrath, or *integer vitae* (how could I?) making the wolves respect me; but I didn't have any taste for the perpetual danger sign, eye-narrowing, tricky Tybalt all coiled up to stab—that whole code—and was without curiosity for what it was like to be hit, and so I refused all the bids to outface or be outfaced.

On this I had Einhorn's views also, whose favorite example was his sitting in the driver's seat of the Stutz as he sometimes did, having been moved over to watch tennis matches or sandlot games—and a coal heaver running up with a tire-tool because he had honked once or twice for the Stutz to move and Dingbat wasn't there to move it. "What could I do," said Einhorn, "if he asked me no questions but started to swing or punch me in the face? With my hands on the wheel, he'd think I was the driver. I'd have to talk fast. Could I talk fast enough? What would make an impression on an animal like that? Would I pretend to faint or play dead? Oh, my God! Even before I was sick, and I was a pretty husky young fellow, I'd do anything possible before I started to trade punches with any sonofabitch, muscle-minded ape or bad character looking for trouble. This city is one place where a person who goes out for a peaceful

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walk is liable to come home with a shiner or bloody nose, and he's almost as likely to get it from a cop's nightstick as from a couple of squareheads who haven't got the few dimes to chase pussy on the high rides in Riverview and so hang around the alley and jump someone. Because you know it's not the city salary the cops live on now, not with all the syndicate money there is to pick up. There isn't a single bootleg alky truck that goes a mile without being convoyed by a squad car. So they don't care what they do. I've heard of them almost killing guys who didn't know enough English to answer their questions." And now, with eager shrewdness of nose and baggy eyes, he began to increase his range; sometimes, with that white hair bunched over his ears and his head lifted back, he looked grand, suffering more *for* than *from* something, relaxing his tense care of himself. "There is some kind of advantage in the roughness of a place like Chicago, of not having any illusions either. Whereas in all the great capitals of the world there's some reason to think humanity is very different. All that ancient culture and those beautiful works of art right out in public, by Michelangelo and Christopher Wren, and those ceremonies, like trooping the color at Buckingham palace or burying a great man in the Pantheon over in Paris. You see those marvelous things and you think that everything savage has moved out. So you think. And then you have another think, and you recall that after they rescued women from the coal-mines, or pulled down the Bastille and got rid of Star Chambers and *lettres de cachet,* ran out the Jesuits, increased education, and built hospitals and spread courtesy and politeness, they had five or six years of war and revolution, from 1914, and killed off twenty million people. Worse than damned cannibals, damn them. And do they think there's less danger to life there than here? That's a riot. Let them say instead that they blast better specimens, but not try to put it over that the only human beings who live by blood are away down on the Orinoco where they hunt heads or out in Cicero. But," he told me, "the best specimens always have been maltreated or killed. I've seen a picture of Aristotle mounted and ridden like a horse by some nasty whore. There was Pythagoras who got killed over a diagram; there was Seneca who had to cut his wrists; there were the teachers and the saints who became martyrs.

"But I sometimes think," he said, "what if a guy came in here

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with a gun and saw me at this desk? If he said 'Stick 'em up!' do you think he'd wait until I explained to him that my arms were paralyzed? He'd let me have it. He'd think I was reaching in a drawer or pushing a signal button, and that would be the finish of Einhorn. Just have a look at the hold-up statistics and then tell me I'm dreaming up trouble. What I ought to do is have a sign put up above my head saying 'Cripple.' But I wouldn't like to be seeing that on the wall all the time. I just hope the Brink's Express and Pinkerton Protective labels all over the place will keep them away."

He often abandoned himself to ideas of death, and notwithstanding that he was advanced in so many ways, his Death was still the old one in shriveling mummy long-johns; the same Death that beautiful maidens failed to see in their mirrors because the mirrors were filled with their white breasts, with the blue light of old German rivers, with cities beyond the window checkered like their own floors. A cheating old rascal with bones showing in his buckskin fringes, not a gentle Sir Cedric greeting young boys from the branches of an apple tree. Einhorn had no kind familiar thoughts of him, but superstitions about this frightful snatcher, and he only played the Thanatopsis stoic, but really considered what to do about this other, who had already gained so much on him. Who maybe was the only real god he had.

Often I thought that in his heart he had completely surrendered to this fear. But when you believed you had tracked Einhorn through his acts and doings and were about to seize him, you found yourself not in the center of a labyrinth at all, but on a wide boulevard; and here he came from a new direction—a governor in a limousine, with state troopers around him, dominant and necessary, everybody's lover, whose death was only one element, and a remote one, of his privacy.

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Raymond Aron

THE LENINIST MYTH OF IMPERIALISM

The theory of imperialism appears, in various forms, in the works of Rosa Luxemburg, Bukharin, Lenin, and others. But the ideas common to all of them can be reduced to a few propositions. First, capitalist economy, because of its very structure, cannot absorb its own production, so that it is compelled to expand, and the individuals do not even become aware of the mechanism that is carrying them away. Second, the race among the European nations to win overseas territories for colonial exploitation, is a fatal consequence of competition. In Africa, in Asia, in Oceania, Europeans seek raw materials, markets, places to invest their surplus capital. The period of colonial expansion marks a stage of capitalist development characterized by the dominance of financial capital and the power of monopolies. Third, the European wars are the fatal result of imperialism: their real stake is the division of the planet, even though they may be occasioned by some European dispute. They are precipitated by the growing imbalance between the mother countries and the colonial empires, by the advent of the era of the closed world. Having encompassed the limits of the planet, the will to power that has driven the capitalists to the remotest corners of the world now turns upon itself.

This theory enjoys tremendous prestige even in non-Marxist circles. It is intellectually satisfying. It accounts for a certain number of facts. The interest manifested by Great Britain, and more recently by the United States, in the Near East, is measured in terms of the oil resources of this region. The Boer War had something to do with the South African gold mines, and the propaganda carried on in London by agents of large development companies. In the course of the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, the European nations carved out empires in Africa for themselves, and simultane-

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ously the foremost of these nations (with the exception of England) returned to protectionism. The great German coal and steel trusts financed a press campaign for an ambitious program of naval construction before 1914, just as they financed National Socialism before 1933; similarly, certain American trusts torpedoed the disarmament conferences. The First World War ended in a new division of the German colonies among the victors, and if the Germans had won, they would have done the same thing—their notorious plan for an "African belt" is sufficient proof of this assumption.

But the objections to these summary and wholesale views are as strong as the arguments adduced in their favor are plausible. There is no relation between the *economic* need for expansion, such as should have obtained according to theory, and the actual facts of colonial expansion. French capitalism was one of the least dynamic in Europe; yet the African empire that France acquired at the end of the nineteenth century is second in importance only to that of Great Britain. Russia, which at that time was only entering upon its capitalistic career, and whose immense territory was still undeveloped, was nevertheless diplomatically active both in Europe and in Asia. The interest she displayed in Manchuria and in the South Slavs was not dictated by economic considerations, nor was it the result of capitalist machinations.

Neither the first nor the second European war originated directly in a conflict over colonies. Morocco provoked several international crises; all of them were settled by diplomatic negotiations—it was as though none of the great powers regarded these remote rivalries as a sufficient motive for resorting to arms. The twenty years preceding the first war were probably among the most prosperous in the history of capitalism. The discovery of the Transvaal gold mines had resulted in a steady advance in prices, which was not, as during the preceding advance in prices, accompanied by a slowing up of mechanization and technological progress; rather, it was linked with an acceleration of these processes, owing to a number of new discoveries. The prevailing protective tariffs remained moderate. The national income of Germany doubled in twenty years. International trade continued to grow. The image of a Europe constrained to destroy itself by its economic contradictions is of a mythological order.

It is undeniable that capitalism tends to incorporate still unex-

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plored territories into its system. And it is not to be denied that colonial conquest can be regarded as dependent on this economic expansion. But whatever the plausibility of such a view may be, two questions remain to be answered: Were the colonial empires in Africa founded in accordance with this schematic pattern? Were the European wars a consequence of these quarrels for the division of the planet? The facts, if they are questioned without bias, answer these two questions in the negative.

During the period between 1870 and 1941, there were instances in which the diplomatic services of nations were mobilized in behalf of capitalists, and when they vigorously defended certain private investments (Venezuela, Persia). Not that foreign ministers were manipulated by capitalists; but they felt justified in defending certain economic positions. The fact is that under the system of private ownership, the ambitions of certain corporations are genuinely identical with national interests. But, apart from the Boer War, which was unleashed largely by the intrigues of a large development company, *none of the colonial undertakings that caused important diplomatic conflicts in Europe was motivated by the quest for capitalist profits; all of them originated in political ambitions that the chancelleries camouflaged by invoking realistic motives.* In other words, the actual relationship is most often the inverse of that accepted by the current theory of imperialism: the economic interests are only a pretext or a rationalization, whereas the profounder cause lies in the nations' will to power.

The timber concessions on the Yalu River that gave rise to the Russo-Japanese War were not the result of a business deal in the current sense of this term. The shareholders could not expect dividends during the first years. The twenty thousand forest rangers sent in as a vanguard were actually disguised Russian soldiers. The company was founded by highly placed individuals who wished to interest the court of the Czar in an enterprise whose purpose was not profits but control of Korea. From the very outset, the objective was conquest.

Nor was the French protectorate in Tunisia established by governments taking orders from industrialists or financiers. Neither the Mejerdah railroad, nor the concession granted to Count Sauvy, nor the agitation of the Société Marseillaise would have influenced the

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Quai d'Orsay, if the latter had not seen in the establishment of the Tunisian protectorate an appropriate complement to the conquest of Algeria.

Nor is it otherwise in the case of Morocco, in relation both to Germany and to France. The Wilhelmstrasse took the Mannesmann Brothers' concession under its protection not because it was under orders of the concessionaires, but because it was glad to have a pretext for intervening. It regretted the fact that banking circles and big industry showed themselves so unconcerned with Morocco: *Die deutschen Banken streiken geradezu alle, sobald man von Marokko spricht* ("All German banks simply go on strike the moment one mentions Morocco"). After the agreement of 1911, when negotiations were opened between the representatives of capital of the two countries, it was the objections of the chancelleries and the political apprehensions that brought about their collapse.

This survey could easily be extended. The celebrated Berlin-Baghdad railroad was a political idea, and the German banks consented to interest themselves in it—with great reluctance—only under pressure from the Wilhelmstrasse. The bank of Rome extended its operations in Tripoli at the instigation of the Italian minister of foreign affairs. It was granted discount privileges on condition that it would invest capital in Tripoli. Once these interests had been created, the relationship was reversed, and the banks campaigned in favor of an active policy. The diplomats created economic interests, in the hope that the defense of these interests would result in territorial acquisitions.

The legendary interpretation can readily be accounted for. Colonialist statesmen, for instance Jules Ferry, constantly invoked economic arguments—the prospect of acquiring naval bases, markets for products, reserves of raw materials, etc. Nothing was easier than to take such arguments literally and transform them into the real causes. It is of course possible that such long-range interests were among the motives of the statesmen. But what the documents disclose is that the initiative came from them. And it is a fact that in each epoch conquerors have found different formulas for dissimulating the will to power, which appears to be one of the constant traits of the European communities.

It is incontestable that once a territory has been acquired, enter-

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prising individuals and companies seek to exploit the protected areas. While this exploitation is not the primary purpose of the governments, they conceive of it as one of the advantages of conquest. More than that, at a time when thinking everywhere is dominated by economic considerations, the so-called colonialists can increase the popularity of their cause by using these considerations to justify it. The public might turn away from them or rebel if they spoke of glory or national greatness.

As for the capitalists, why should it be surprising that their conduct does not conform with the pattern ascribed to it by vulgar Marxism? From the standpoint of big industry and the banks of the Second Reich, there were less dangerous and more profitable enterprises than Morocco or the Berlin-Baghdad railroad. The more that Germany asserted its claim to a place in the world market, the more did the capitalist leaders have cause to fear a European war. In 1911, the falling stock exchange prices, and the intervention of great financiers with the Kaiser, contributed to the peaceful solution of the crisis. For capitalism, a war meant the risk of losing more than it could gain in Morocco.

On the other hand, it would not be less erroneous to imagine that large-scale German capitalism was devoted to the preservation of peace. The truth is that nothing in living reality conforms to this vague concept of "German capitalism." This capitalism did not constitute an entity aware of itself, pursuing long-range objectives, and manipulating popular masses and governments to serve its ambition. In actual fact, its activities were varied, contradictory, depending on the actions of individuals and the working of circumstances. The following of the naval and pan-Germanic leagues was for the most part lower-middle class and nationalistic in character. In wartime, manufacturers' associations launched projects for peacetime, intended to ruin foreign competitors. In the event of victory, they would have clamored for the annexation of Lorraine and of African colonies; with similar motives, German banks and industrial establishments colonized the occupied territories between 1940 and 1944. Some sectors were oriented toward peaceful trade, others were largely inspired by imperialist ambition. In actual fact, capitalist circles, with their hesitations and their divergent views, reflected public opinion far more than they formed it.

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The central thesis of Lenin's theory is this, that the twentieth-century wars, though waged in Europe and precipitated by European conflicts, have as their stake and meaning the division of the planet. The main difficulty in trying to refute this theory is that it is difficult to see how it can be proved and by the same token how it can be disproved. No one denies that the First World War broke out because of German-Slav rivalry in the Balkans. Nor does anyone deny that the victors did not return to Germany the colonies they had occupied during the hostilities, and that secret agreements had provided for the division of these colonies among the Allies. No one questions the fact that if Germany had been victorious she would have seized at least part of the French and British empires. It can therefore be taken for granted that the immediate cause of the war had nothing to do with overseas territories, and that the issue of the war inevitably implied a new division of the colonies. Beyond these facts, we are in the realm of interpretations.

The burden of proof obviously rests upon those who attribute to the events a deep significance unknown to the protagonists. In neither of the two camps did statesmen believe that the acquisition of distant possessions justified a European war, or that the economic system had no choice but to expand. It is true that the victorious camp profited from the occasion to seize the colonies of the defeated camp; but this eventuation does not introduce any new factor into the process of European history, and does not prove in any way that Frenchmen, Englishmen, or Germans, though they thought they were fighting to preserve the power or the honor of their respective nations, fought in actuality because the capitalists, having reached the limits of the earth, had finally no other choice but to resort to arms to enlarge their respective shares in the territory of the world.

In the forming of alignments, as well as in the unleashing of hostilities, it is easy to discover the influence of traditional or emotional conflicts; but they supply no proof of the allegation that in our time capitalist rivalries sovereignly determine human fate. The French penetration of Morocco created an additional reason for discord; but Frenchmen and Germans, whose economies were to a far greater degree complementary than competing, had never become reconciled after 1870. The French were not calling for a war to recover Alsace-Lorraine, but neither had they morally ratified the

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amputation of their territory. Moreover, calculations of the most classic type regarding the balance of forces made them inhospitable to the idea of joining their powerful neighbor. If France had allied herself to a neighboring nation and incomparably stronger land power, she would have lost almost all of her independence, while as an ally of a naval power or of a distant land power, she essentially retained it. Such diplomatic mechanisms mark all eras.

Nor does the conflict between Russia and Austria-Hungary or Germany seem essentially economic in origin. To be sure, their interests may have been in conflict at one point or another. But Russia's interests—which, incidentally, were more political than economic—clashed (in Persia and in Afghanistan) with those of Great Britain more than with those of any other European nation. It was the fate of the South Slavs that definitely separated Czarist Russia from the other empires, despite their common conservatism, their wish to preserve the dynastic principle, and their fear of revolutionary movements.

The only way of giving some plausibility to the interpretation espoused by Marxist sympathizers, is to represent the war of 1914-1918 as determined above all by German-British rivalry, and then to represent this rivalry as an effect of trade competition. Many German publicists defended this thesis from other motives. Desiring to clear their country of all guilt, to represent it as a victim of jealous Haves, they made a great deal of articles published in the English press at the end of the nineteenth century and more especially the beginning of the twentieth century—articles fulminating against the expansion of Germany, which was described as a deadly threat to Great Britain, and suggesting a resort to arms as the only means of saving Old England's prosperity.

Actually such voices were isolated, and did not in any way reflect the opinion of leading banking, industrial, or political circles. It was the opposite conception, as developed by Norman Angell in his widely known book, *The Great Illusion,* that underlay the predominant opinion. What was Norman Angell's central thesis? It was that modern war does not pay, that the annexation of provinces does not increase the wealth of the inhabitants of the victorious country. National wealth is increased by a certain amount x, but it must be divided by a proportionately increased denominator; in the

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end everybody finds himself where he was before. One may try to eliminate a rival. But in doing so one also loses a customer and a supplier, and the effect of the deprivation inflicted on one's neighbor rebounds upon oneself. Modern economy creates solidarity among the nations. The idea of sharing spoils, of seizing treasures, belongs to another age. In the century of industry and trade, war would deal a fatal blow to everyone, victors and vanquished; in the damage sustained by the capitalist system, no one would be spared.

This demonstration, which is valid on the whole if Angell's implicit assumptions are granted (the existence of a world system, and of respect for individual property on the part of belligerents), holds true in regard to the relations between Great Britain and Germany, as became evident after 1918. Leading circles in the two countries were perfectly aware of the fact, notwithstanding that the competition between them was very real. Germany and Great Britain were first-rank customers and suppliers for each other. In 1913, more than 20 per cent of German imports came from the British Empire, which absorbed more than 18 per cent of German exports. Germany bought 1,168 million marks' worth of British products, and Britain bought 1,534 million marks' worth of German products. In her capacity as banker, carrier, underwriter, England drew indirect profits from German exports.

It is true that from 1904 to 1913 these increased by 93 per cent —that is, more than the British exports, which increased by only 74.7 per cent. But the per capita figure for volume of national exports remained far higher in Great Britain—233 marks as against 150. Moreover, the exports of the two countries were channeled in different directions, on the whole: 66 per cent of British exports went to non-European areas, while 77 per cent of German exports went to European markets. This divergence did not exclude frictions: here and there German products displaced British products. But a British government or capitalist class that would have concluded, on the basis of these marginal frictions, that it was imperative to crush the competitor by force of arms, would have been acting like the folk-tale hero who killed the goose that laid the golden egg. Before accepting an interpretation implying motives that may seem rational but are actually absurd, one should have proofs. Now, there are no proofs; rather, there are disproofs.

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It was during the phase of declining prices, from 1880 to 1895, that trade competition between the two countries was most intense, and the diplomatic relations between them at their best. After the turn of the century, the general economic upswing reduced the trade rivalry, while at the same time diplomatic relations between them deteriorated. There is no mystery in this. For diplomatic alignments are determined not by conditions of economic rivalry or solidarity, but by considerations of power, by racial or cultural affinities, by the passions of the masses. Economically, Great Britain's outstanding rival since the beginning of the century has consistently been the United States. Yet these two Anglo-Saxon powers have never been on the verge of waging war against each other. Hence this admirable statement in a recent Soviet publication: "The characteristic feature of this contradiction [between Great Britain and the United States] lies in the fact that it unfolds within the framework of close co-operation, both economic and diplomatic." The truth is that trade rivalries between nations are one thing, and life-and-death struggles another. There is small truth to the myth that millions of men were sent to their deaths to open up markets for industries.

The essential cause of the hostility between Great Britain and Germany was Germany's creation of a navy. By threatening or seeming to threaten British naval supremacy, Germany, perhaps without realizing it, precipitated a break that contributed to creating the diplomatic constellation as a result of which the explosion took place. The British people know that for them control of the seas is not a matter of prestige or a luxury, but a question of life and death. The naval policy of Wilhelm II and von Tirpitz could be interpreted only as a challenge, and it necessarily drove Great Britain into joining the Franco-Russian alliance.

It might be said that Great Britain would under no circumstances have tolerated the annihilation of France, and that she would have intervened whether von Tirpitz built his fleet or not. We do not have to confirm or reject this consideration, because it is irrelevant to our main thesis—that military alignments are political in origin. Great Britain has yielded her hegemony in the air and on the seas to the United States not without bitterness; she would never have yielded it, without a fight to the end, to Wilhelminian or Hitlerian Germany.

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Whereas the First World War followed a period of rising prices and expanding international trade, the second broke out ten years after the beginning of the greatest depression in the history of capitalism. In most countries recovery had taken place several years before the war, and production levels were generally higher than before the depression. But this recovery had a special character: it had taken place within each nation. International trade, instead of continuing to develop as in the preceding century, had not recovered its pre-1929 volume, and the dominant economy, that of the United States, had not overcome a condition of underemployment that seemed chronic. One would have to be blind or fanatic to deny that there was a relation between the slump of 1929 and the war of 1939.

One of the immediate causes of National Socialism's rise to power was indisputably the unprecedented economic crisis, with its concomitant of millions of unemployed. But the exceptional acuteness of the crisis, particularly in Germany, cannot be imputed to the effects of the autonomous evolution of the capitalist system. A sequence of events, accidental in relation to world economic developments (the financial policy of Great Britain, the rate of exchange for the pound, the use of the gold exchange standard, the pyramiding of credits in the United States, the high level of world prices, which were made dependent on American prices following the wartime inflation, the German inflation, the accumulation of foreign loans, etc.), had brought about the situation of 1929 and the collapse that followed. Without resorting to specious arguments, it would be possible to show that many of these accidents originated directly or indirectly in the First World War and its aftermaths. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the road from Versailles to the September aggression against Poland leads through the depression of 1929. Assuming that this depression was in a way a consequence of the First World War, it is even more certain that it was one of the causes of the second.

Between 1930 and 1933, the Germany of the Weimar regime, stricken by unemployment, had a choice between three orientations. She could adapt her domestic economy to world conditions, undertake total planning under the leadership of the workers' party, which was inclined to co-operate with Soviet Russia, or undertake planning under the leadership of the "national" parties, with rearmament

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and diplomatic aggressiveness. The second solution was ruled out because of the existing balance of strength, because of popular passions. Moreover, by concentrating its attack on the "social traitors," the Communist party was robbing the parties of the left of the small chances of success they might have had. Neither the masses nor the parties were willing to accept the sacrifices implied in the first solution. Adjustment to world economic conditions would probably have required a devaluation of the mark, which was unpopular because of the memories of the inflation, or failing that, a lowering of nominal wages, which was resisted by the trade unions, and a credit policy inspired by the theories of Keynes. Recovery under these conditions would have been slow and gradual. It would logically have implied a diplomatic armistice over a period of a few years. But nationalistic feeling among the people had been exacerbated by economic distress and by the propaganda against the Treaty of Versailles. Rightist circles were impatient to recover sovereignty with regard to armaments. The coalition of the Hitlerites and the nationalists, symbol of the *rapprochement* between the revolutionaries and the traditional conservatives, was founded on the common will to achieve certain objectives—liquidation of unemployment on a national basis, rearmament, and revision of the Treaty of Versailles.

We shall not contend that the former ruling classes unanimously desired this solution, and the share of responsibility of each group remains a matter of controversy—*i.e,* how much individual responsibility is to be attributed to the financiers and captains of industry who contributed money to the National Socialist movement, and to the Rhenish bankers and East Prussian landowners who brought about the coalition of January 1933. All formulas ascribing a specific attitude to any single one of the ruling classes have always been semi-mythological in character. There was no lack of conservatives who were uneasy about the brown-shirted demagogues. All that can be said is that in the seizure of power by the National Socialists, the prerequisite was the consent to this adventure given by a fraction of the former ruling classes. Apprentice sorcerers, these men expected the Fuehrer to subject the masses to discipline, to reintegrate the millions of the unemployed into the army or to absorb them in the factories, to restore sovereignty and power to Germany; they,

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no more than others, wanted the thing that came to an end in the bunker of Berlin, with the crushing of their homeland.

Unemployment, that is, the economic depression, was at the root of the rearmament. The formula that makes unemployment the cause of it would be a great oversimplification of the truth. The United States had more than twelve million unemployed, yet neither the masses nor the leaders thought of mobilizing an army or building a war industry. The resort to a war economy was natural for the Germans, faithful to their military traditions, and anxious to alter, if not to supersede, the status imposed by the Treaty of Versailles. In one way or another, a little sooner or a little later, Germany would have demanded and obtained equality, demanded if not obtained a revision of the treaties of peace. On the other hand, it was not implied in the permanent elements of the German situation that a man like Hitler and a party like the National Socialists must inevitably seize power. War was implied in the style and in the ambitions of the National Socialists, not in those of the traditional nationalists.

Once rearmament had begun, and the theory of full employment on a national basis was applied, was war inevitable? Did rearmament lead to aggression, just as unemployment had led to rearmament? Did the economic system of the Third Reich rule out the peace or even the truce that, on the eve of the seizure of Prague, a British trade delegation once again offered to the Berlin rulers? These questions are abstract and so to speak unreal. Hitler and his companions had always thought in political and not in economic terms. What they wanted for their country was power, the reward of which would be to attain the wealth of a master nation. They never asked themselves whether they could ever call a halt from an economic standpoint, for from 1939 on they had not had the slightest intention of doing so. Occasionally at least Hitler directly wanted war, which he thought he alone could wage victoriously, and which he regarded as indispensable for the realization of his schemes. The National Socialist system itself derived from a will to empire.

Would not Hitler have been driven to attempt conquests at all events, by force of the economic system that he had erected? This thesis is advanced by pseudo-Marxists who allege that they discover in Schachtism the same imperialist fatality they ascribe to monopoly

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capitalism. It is also advanced by other critics, according to whom National Socialism or Hitler himself would have been endangered by a peace, even a provisional one.

From 1938 on, after the departure of Schacht, the economic situation changed. What was feared was no longer unemployment but inflation. Not only had full employment been achieved, but there was a manpower shortage. An attempt was launched to transform the small shopkeepers, whose votes had been won by means of demagogic attacks against the Jews and the department stores, into industrial workers. At that moment, Schacht advocated a pause. He wanted to stop issue of workers' bonds or short-term bonds, since they no longer served to incorporate unemployed men or machines into the productive process, and since they thus no longer had any basis of security and constituted only spurious liens. Therefore it seemed absurd to maintain that the non-resumption of private investment was threatening the economy of the Third Reich with a collapse that only the war prevented.

In 1934, the theory of pump priming was refuted: a limited dosage of supplementary purchasing power, created by means of public works projects, had proven insufficient to create general prosperity. Pump priming had had only limited effects. Private investments had remained at a standstill. The government had to assume the task that it had hoped to leave to the initiative of the entrepreneurs. But in 1938 and in 1939, the situation was quite different: after rearmament, after the four-year plan and the annexation of Austria and of Czechoslovakia, the Third Reich did not have to choose between military conquest and a relapse into economic stagnation.

But, it might be objected, was the threat not from another direction—namely, was it not caused by the shortage of foreign currency, needed to buy the foodstuffs that the soil of the Third Reich was not supplying, and the raw materials that its substratum, even after the extension of its territory, did not contain? The conquests had aggravated rather than corrected the imbalance. Neither Austria nor Czechoslovakia was self-sufficient; both imported part of their foodstuffs, and both were bound to the world economy more than the Reich was. It is not to be disputed that in March 1939 autarchy was an ideal as remote, as inaccessible, as it had been at the outset of

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the adventure. In the long run, from a philosophical point of view, it might be said that choice between integration into world economy and a supernational economy based on a *Grossraum,* an expanded national territory, continued to present itself. But the need for decision was not urgent. The Western democracies were ready to appease by concessions. Once again, Hitler was not subjected to any economic constraint.

Would Hitler's authority or his regime have been shaken by a truce? Would Hitler have lost part of the prestige he had won by his peaceful triumphs? There is nothing to justify an affirmative answer to these questions. In September 1938 the German people dreaded a general war almost as much as the British and French peoples dreaded it. They would not have found fault with their Fuehrer for saving the peace; rather they would have taken the contrary attitude. After Munich, Germany held hegemony in Central Europe more complete than that which had been refused to Wilhelminian Germany before 1914. But so long as there was the Soviet Union on one side, and the Franco-British alliance on the other, the hegemony over *Mitteleuropa* fell short of assuring a European empire. The truth concealed under the allegations of political or economic necessity is that Hitler was not content with his hegemony. He wanted to take advantage of his temporary superiority in armament at least to liquidate Poland. And therewith he unleashed the monster.

The economy of the Third Reich gave rise to multiple incitements to imperial aggrandizement. Norman Angell's reasoning does not apply to a system such as that of National Socialist Germany. According to the English pacifist, it is immaterial whether a territorial unit containing mines and factories lies on this or that side of the frontier signs. If it is on this side, the populations of other territorial units wishing to obtain coal or manufactured products must send goods of equal value in exchange to the national or other producer. But when relations between various economic units are restricted as a result of non-convertibility of their currencies and control of foreign trade, the argument loses its force. If the coal or iron mines are situated beyond the borders of a given unit, it will be obliged to exploit poorer mines within its borders, mines with a smaller output, and to consent to increased expenditures for equipment and labor.

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Or coal or iron will have to be purchased by means of goods that will then be insufficient for a given barter agreement. In other words, in the case of national socialism, the location of the frontier posts is of great importance: trade within economic units and trade between economic units become different in character.

Inevitably, a partisan of national socialism inclines to the theory of the *Grossraum*. The authoritarian organization of an economic whole develops the more smoothly, the less obstacles are encountered by the will of the planners. By definition, the planners do not dispose over the people and the raw materials situated on the other side of the customs line. They cannot foresee the free prices of the raw materials they must import, nor can they foresee the changing tastes of those who by buying their manufactured products, supply them from the outside with foreign currency. Compulsory subjection to the foreign customer means the survival of a principle which the planners are attempting to suppress at home. Subjection changes into sovereignty on the day when sellers and buyers have been reduced by force of arms to the common law of a planned economy.

Russia, though lagging behind in her equipment, was better adjusted to the so-called Marxist experiment because she was less dependent on international trade than any other European country. Capable in an emergency of being more or less self-sufficient, she could resist the blockade and apply to the full the idea of authoritarian planning. But when applied to national economies that are traditionally bound up with world economy, the same method inevitably gives rise to imperialist temptations. The ambition for conquest and the dream of rationalization are combined in the *Grossraum* theory.

Thus we are far from denying the imperialistic potentialities of the economic policy adopted by the National Socialists. We maintain only that the Third Reich was not driven to imperialism by residues of capitalism in its structure. If the private entrepreneurs or managers had been replaced by government-appointed managers, if the Ruhr had been nationalized, if the planning had been total, the imperialist temptation would not have been mitigated. Rather, the opposite is true. If German heavy industry had become collective property, it would not have been less disproportionate to the needs of the

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domestic market as regards peaceful consumption. The need for outside purchase of supplies for the people and for the plants, the wish to include in the plan a territory as vast as possible, would have persisted. In short, the contradiction between the essence of modern economy and *national* socialism, between political nationalism and the industrial system, would not have been overcome, and this contradiction is the ultimate cause of the suicide of Europe.

This contradiction, as we have seen, is not the source of the First World War; it emerged only during the struggle. A traditional conflict was amplified into a superwar because of the weapons that industry put at the disposal of the combatants. In the years preceding 1939, the contradiction became more acute. The disturbances that followed the war, the depression of 1929, had thrown the states back upon the expedients of controlled trade, of planning in isolation from world economy. National Socialism marked the extreme form of this falling back on intranational resources. This structure was not based on peaceful international trade, nor on the peaceful coexistence of empires. Although the motives of the protagonists were political, although the conqueror was inspired by will to power, Europe, before the Hitlerian adventure, was torn by an absurd status. The European nations are not a rational framework for planned economy.

Modern industry and militarism have always been associated throughout the centuries of their simultaneous flowering. Although none of the fundamental discoveries that made the industrial revolution possible seems to have been occasioned by military needs, such discoveries have often accelerated progress or given rise to improvements in manufacturing methods. Assembly-line production in metallurgy and textiles was partly the effect of military requirements, and at the same time it determined the character of the battles.

Current expressions emphasize the analogies between the style of modern industry and that of the army. Armies tear away thousands, hundreds of thousands, and finally millions of men from a communal, organic mode of life, and subject them to a hierarchy organized in accordance with the sole imperative of collective action and performance. Industry gives rise to a similar process. Factory discipline is not the same as the discipline of the barracks; the worker, outside his shop, continues to have a family life. Nevertheless there is

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an unquestionable similarity between the two, and the labor camps of wartime Germany and of five-year plans in Russia stress this similarity to the point of horror.

The evolution of capitalism during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century had opened up a different perspective. Humanization of industrial work had seemed not impossible. Higher living standards had made it possible to restore to the worker the personal life of which he had been deprived during the stage of initial accumulation, the pioneer stage of the coal, textile, and metallurgic industries. The municipal workers' quarters in Sweden, in Germany—like those later erected in some English centers—no longer evoked the image of the "wretched of the earth." At least a part of the proletariat was gradually acceding to decent living conditions. Increasing access to middle-class comforts was mitigating the isolation of the worker and the amorphism of the masses. The industrial army was slowly returning to civilian life.

The wars did not halt the rise of the working class; in some respects, in some countries, they accelerated it. But they brought forth a danger that the bourgeoisie, in the epoch of its splendor, had not even conceived of—the subjection of all of society to the law of military organization. At the very moment when economic progress has been helping to cure some of the evils chargeable to technology, the wars have brought about the total mobilization of collectivities. Tomorrow the rule of the bourgeoisie may look like a precarious transition between the military order of the aristocracies and the military order of the technocracies.

(*Translated from the French by Norbert Guterman*)

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Vernon Watkins

LLEWELYN'S CHARIOT

Sun of all suns, seed of dandelion seeds,
Sprung from the stem of delight and the starry course,
High at the helm of night, in the van of deeds,
A one-wheeled carriage you drive and a headless horse.
Your Maker makes you his glory, you grasp and push
Through bars the bugle, the mirror, the string of beads,
The doll and the wooden men; with a mighty wish
You ride the brunt of creation's galloping beds.

What golden fleece enshrines at the very prow
Your marveling head, and summons from ancient seas
Sailors toiling, under the black sea-crow,
What ever-moving, miraculous, wind-faint fleece;
But you kick those puppets, those men of deeds, through the bars,
The tossed men lost, the lost men under the ark,
Seed of spray's seed, swept from the flight of the stars
To a point of light in your look that is almost dark.

Rameses, trumpet and chariot, all you outrun
Grasping your cage where grief is banished for good,
Created nothing, timeless, perpetual one
Dropped from light-years to crawl under legs of wood,
Star-seed, breath-downed, dropped from the topmost sun
To the toppling house near the shed that shadows a hearse,
From whirling, luminous night, to sleep here alone
In the darkness a great light leaves, where a feather stirs.

And I, your listener, stopped on the stairway of breath,
Awake, in the stranger's bed, in the cold, high room,
Calling the sea from Leviathan hollows of earth,
I watch them, castaway toys, while you drive and boom

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Your course in the cot to my bed, with the speed of ice,
The giant mirror, the trumpet ringed with a bell,
Till naked you stand, gold-fleeced, shaping, a shell,
All seas to your color, Llewelyn, child above price.

Peter Viereck

CHILDHOOD

You cannot bear this silent, heavenly sadness.
You need voluptuous, need tellurian sighs.
Not up but down, down, earthward is your sky,
Your own (but how to make you know?) by birth.
There shines the park that offers you more lilacs
Than all the arms of longing can enfold.
And so you grow, you grope for parks while drifting
All the while southward all unknowingly.
Then groves more south, more slow than lukewarm breezes
(More south, more velvet) sing you dissonances
(More dense, more south) that cloy unbearably,
Till every vibrant, swaying twig bends down
Heavy with figs and with the grapes of breasts.

Such exhalation, then, of tenderness—
Of fondling tides on crumbling promontories,
Of shade of clouds on white young birch-bark, fleeting
As patterns hinted on the wildest grasses
By rims of bicycles in picnic weather—
Slakes you to sleepiness. You snuff the sun out;
You unroll far beaches to your chin like quilts.
You become a *Maerchen* dreamed by the deep, cool clams,
And by the huddling bats of timeless caves.
Eight hundred years of this. And then a signal.
You'll know, you'll never doubt it, you'll arise;
And, yawning, stretch into a constellation;
And fill the sky that has been waiting for you.

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James Baldwin

MANY THOUSANDS GONE

It is only in his music, which Americans are able to admire only because a protective sentimentality limits their understanding of it, that the Negro in America has been able to tell his story. It is a story which otherwise has yet to be told and which no American is prepared to hear. As is the inevitable result of things unsaid, we find ourselves until today oppressed with a dangerous and reverberating silence; and the story is told, compulsively, in symbols and signs, in hieroglyphics; it is revealed in Negro speech and in that of the white majority and in their different frames of reference. The ways in which the Negro has affected the American psychology is betrayed in our popular culture and in our morality; in our estrangement from him is the depth of our estrangement from ourselves. We cannot ask: what do we *really* feel about him?—such a question merely opens the gates on chaos. What we really feel about him is involved with all that we feel about everything, about everyone, about ourselves.

The story of the Negro in America is the story of America—or, more precisely, it is the story of Americans. It is not a very pretty story: the story of a people is never very pretty. The Negro in America, gloomily referred to as that shadow which lies athwart our national life, is far more than that. He is a series of shadows, self-created, intertwining, which now we helplessly battle. One may say that the Negro in America does not really exist except in the darkness of our minds.

This is why his history and his progress, his relationship to all other Americans, has been kept in the social arena. He is a social and not a personal or a human problem; to think of him is to think of statistics, slums, rapes, injustices, remote violence; it is to be con-

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fronted with an endless cataloguing of losses, gains, skirmishes; it is to feel virtuous, outraged, helpless, as though his continuing status among us were somehow analogous to disease—cancer, perhaps, or tuberculosis—which must be checked, even though it cannot be cured. In this arena the black man acquires quite another aspect from that which he has in life. We do not know what to do with him in life; if he breaks our sociological and sentimental image of him we are panic-stricken and we feel ourselves betrayed. When he violates this image therefore, he stands in the greatest danger (sensing which, we uneasily suspect that he is very often playing a part for our benefit); and, what is not always so apparent but is equally true, we are then in some danger ourselves—hence our retreat or our blind and immediate retaliation.

Our dehumanization of the Negro then is indivisible from our dehumanization of ourselves: the loss of our own identity is the price we pay for our annulment of his. Time and our own force act as our allies, creating an impossible, a fruitless tension between the traditional master and slave. Impossible and fruitless because, literal and visible as this tension has become, it has nothing to do with reality.

Time has made some changes in the Negro face. Nothing has succeeded in making it exactly like our own, though the general desire seems to be to make it blank if one cannot make it white. When it has become blank, the past as thoroughly washed from the black face as it has been from ours, our guilt will be finished—at least it will have ceased to be visible, which we imagine to be much the same thing. But, paradoxically, it is we who prevent this from happening; since it is we who, every hour that we live, re-invest the black face with our guilt; and we do this—by a further paradox, no less ferocious—helplessly, passionately, out of an unrealized need to suffer absolution.

Today, to be sure, we know that the Negro is not biologically or mentally inferior; there is no truth in those rumors of his body odor or his incorrigible sexuality; or no more truth than can be easily explained or even defended by the social sciences. Yet, in our most recent war, his blood was segregated as was, for the most part, his person. Up to today we are set at a division, so that he may not marry our daughters or our sisters, nor may he—for the most part—

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eat at our tables or live in our houses. Moreover, those who do, do so at the grave expense of a double alienation; from their own people, whose fabled attributes they must either deny or, worse, cheapen and bring to market; from us, for we require of them, when we accept them, that they at once cease to be Negroes and yet not fail to remember what being a Negro means: to remember, that is, what it means to us. The threshold of insult is higher or lower, according to the people involved, from the boot-black in Atlanta to the celebrity in New York. One must travel very far, among saints with nothing to gain or outcasts with nothing to lose, to find a place where it does not matter—and perhaps a word or a gesture or simply a silence will testify that it matters even there.

For it means something to be a Negro, after all, as it means something to have been born in Ireland or in China, to live where one sees space and sky or to live where one sees nothing but rubble or nothing but high buildings. We cannot escape our origins, however hard we try, those origins which contain the key—could we but find it—to all that we later become. What it means to be a Negro is a good deal more than this essay can discover; what it means to be a Negro in America can perhaps be suggested by an examination of the myths we perpetuate about him.

Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom are dead, their places taken by a group of amazingly well-adjusted young men and women, almost as dark, but ferociously literate, well-dressed and scrubbed; who are never laughed at, who are not likely ever to set foot in a cotton or tobacco field or in any but the most modern of kitchens. There are others who remain in our odd idiom, 'underprivileged'; some are bitter and these come to grief; some are unhappy, but, continually presented with the evidence of a better day soon to come, are speedily becoming less so. Most of them care nothing whatever about race. They want only their proper place in the sun and the right to be left alone, like any other citizen of the republic. We may all breathe more easily. Before, however, our joy at the demise of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom approaches the indecent, we had better ask whence they sprang, how they lived? Into what limbo have they vanished?

However inaccurate our portraits of them were, these portraits do suggest, not only the conditions but the quality of their lives and the impact of this spectacle on our consciences. There was no one

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more forbearing than Aunt Jemima, no one stronger or more pious or more loyal or more wise; there was, at the same time, no one weaker or more faithless or more vicious and certainly no one more immoral. Uncle Tom, trustworthy and sexless, needed only to drop the title "Uncle" to become violent, crafty and sullen, a menace to any white woman who passed by. They prepared our feast tables and our burial clothes; and if we could boast that we understood them, it was far more to the point and far more true that they understood us. They were, moreover, the only people in the world who did; and not only did they know us better than we knew ourselves, but they knew us better than we knew them. This was the piquant flavoring to the national joke, it lay behind our uneasiness as it lay behind our benevolence: Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom, our creations, at the last evaded us; they had a life—their own, perhaps a better life than ours—and they would never tell us what it was. At the point where we were driven most privately and painfully to conjecture what depths of contempt, what heights of indifference, what prodigies of resilience, what untamable superiority allowed them so vividly to endure, neither perishing, nor rising up in a body to wipe us from the earth, the image perpetually shattered and the word failed. The black man in our midst carried murder in his heart, he wanted vengeance. We carried murder too, we wanted peace.

In our image of the Negro breathes the past we deny, not dead but living yet and powerful, the beast in our jungle of statistics. It is this which defeats us, which continues to defeat us, which lends to inter-racial cocktail parties their rattling, genteel, nervously smiling air: in any drawing room at such a gathering the beast may spring, filling the air with flying things and an unenlightened wailing. Wherever the problem touches there is confusion, there is danger. Wherever the Negro face appears a tension is created, the tension of a silence filled with things unutterable. It is a sentimental error, therefore, to believe that the past is dead; it means nothing to say that it is all forgotten, that the Negro himself has forgotten it. It is not a question of memory. Oedipus did not remember the thongs that bound his feet, nevertheless the marks they left testified to that doom toward which his feet were leading him. The man does not remember the hand that struck him, the darkness that frightened

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him, as a child; nevertheless, the hand and the darkness remain with him, indivisible from himself forever, part of the passion that drives him wherever he thinks to take flight.

The making of an American begins at that point where he himself rejects all other ties, any other history; and himself adopts the vesture of his adopted land. This problem has been faced by all Americans throughout our history—in a way it *is* our history—and it baffles the immigrant and sets on edge the second generation until today. In the case of the Negro the past was taken from him whether he would or no; yet to forswear it was meaningless and availed him nothing, since his shameful history was carried, quite literally, on his brow. Shameful; for he was heathen as well as black and would never have discovered the healing blood of Christ had not we braved the jungles to bring him these glad tidings. Shameful; for, since our role as missionary had not been wholly disinterested, it was necessary to recall the shame from which we had delivered him in order more easily to escape our own. As he accepted the alabaster Christ and the bloody cross—in the bearing of which he would find his redemption, as, indeed, to our outraged astonishment, he sometimes did—he must, henceforth, accept that image we then gave him of himself: having no other and standing, moreover, in danger of death should he fail to accept the dazzling light thus brought into such darkness. It is this quite simple dilemma that must be borne in mind if we wish to comprehend his psychology.

However we shift the light which beats so fiercely on his head, or *prove,* by victorious social analysis, how his lot has changed, how we have both improved, our uneasiness refuses to be exorcized. And nowhere is this more apparent than in our literature on the subject—'problem' literature when written by whites, 'protest' literature when written by Negroes—and nothing is more striking than the tremendous disparity of tone between the two creations. *Kingsblood Royal* bears, for example, almost no kinship to *If He Hollers Let Him Go,* though the same reviewers praised them both for what were, at bottom, very much the same reasons. These reasons may be suggested, far too briefly but not at all unjustly, by observing that the presupposition is in both novels exactly the same: black is a terrible color with which to be born into the world.

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Now the most powerful and celebrated statement we have yet had of what it means to be a Negro in America is unquestionably Richard Wright's *Native Son*. The feeling which prevailed at the time of its publication was that such a novel, bitter, uncompromising, shocking, gave proof, by its very existence, of what strides might be taken in a free democracy; and its indisputable success, proof that Americans were now able to look full in the face without flinching the dreadful facts. Americans, unhappily, have the most remarkable ability to alchemize all bitter truths into an innocuous but piquant confection and to transform their moral contradictions, or public discussion of such contradictions, into a proud decoration, such as are given for heroism on the field of battle. Such a book, we felt with pride, could never have been written before—which was true. Nor could it be written today. It bears already the aspect of a landmark; for Bigger and his brothers have undergone yet another metamorphosis; they have been accepted in baseball leagues and by colleges hitherto exclusive; and they have made a most favorable appearance on the national screen. We have yet to encounter, nevertheless, a report so indisputably authentic, or one that can begin to challenge this most significant novel.

It is, in a certain American tradition, the story of an unremarkable youth in battle with the force of circumstance; that force of circumstance which plays and which has played so important a part in the national fables of success or failure. In this case the force of circumstance is not poverty merely but color, a circumstance which cannot be overcome, against which the protagonist battles for his life and loses. It is, on the surface, remarkable that this book should have enjoyed among Americans the favor it did enjoy; no more remarkable, however, than that it should have been compared, exuberantly, to Dostoevsky, though placed a shade below Dos Passos, Dreiser and Steinbeck; and when the book is examined, its impact does not seem remarkable at all, but becomes, on the contrary, perfectly logical and inevitable.

We cannot, to begin with, divorce this book from the specific social climate of that time: it was one of the last of those angry productions encountered in the late 'twenties and all through the 'thirties dealing with the inequities of the social structure of America. It was published one year before our entry into the last world

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war—which is to say, very few years after the dissolution of the W.P.A. and the end of the New Deal and at a time when bread lines and soup kitchens and bloody industrial battles were bright in everyone's memory. The rigors of that unexpected time filled us not only with a genuinely bewildered and despairing idealism—so that, because there at least was *something* to fight for, young men went off to die in Spain—but also with a genuinely bewildered self-consciousness. The Negro, who had been during the magnificent 'twenties a passionate and delightful primitive, now became, as one of the things we were most self-conscious about, our most oppressed minority. In the 'thirties, swallowing Marx whole, we discovered the Worker and realized—I should think with some relief—that the aims of the Worker and the aims of the Negro were one. This theorem—to which we shall return—seems now to leave rather too much out of account; it became, nevertheless, one of the slogans of the "class struggle" and the gospel of the New Negro.

As for this New Negro, it was Wright who became his most eloquent spokesman; and his work, from its beginning, is most clearly committed to the social struggle. Leaving aside the considerable question of what relationship precisely the artist bears to the revolutionary, the reality of man as a social being is not his only reality and that artist is strangled who is forced to deal with human beings solely in social terms; and who has, moreover, as Wright had, the necessity thrust on him of being the representative of some thirteen million people. It is a false responsibility (since writers are not congressmen) and impossible, by its nature, of fulfillment. The unlucky shepherd soon finds that, so far from being able to feed the hungry sheep, he has lost the wherewithal for his own nourishment: having not been allowed—so fearful was his burden, so present his audience!—to recreate his own experience. Further, the militant men and women of the 'thirties were not, upon examination, significantly emancipated from their antecedents, however bitterly they might consider themselves estranged or however gallantly they struggled to build a better world. However they might extol Russia, their concept of a better world was quite helplessly American and betrayed a certain thinness of imagination, a suspect reliance on suspect and badly digested formulae, and a positively fretful romantic haste. Finally, the relationship of the Negro to the Worker cannot be

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summed up, nor even greatly illuminated, by saying that their aims are one. It is true only insofar as they both desire better working conditions and useful only insofar as they unite their strength as workers to achieve these ends. Further than this we cannot in honesty go.

In this climate Wright's voice first was heard and the struggle which promised for a time to shape his work and give it purpose also fixed it in an ever more unrewarding rage. Recording his days of anger he has also nevertheless recorded, as no Negro before him had ever done, that fantasy Americans hold in their minds when they speak of the Negro: that fantastic and fearful image which we have lived with since the first slave fell beneath the lash. This is the significance of *Native Son* and also, unhappily, its overwhelming limitation.

Native Son begins with the *Brring!* of an alarm clock in the squalid Chicago tenement where Bigger and his family live. Rats live there too, feeding off the garbage, and we first encounter Bigger in the act of killing one. One may consider that the entire book, from that harsh *Brring!* to Bigger's weak "Good-by" as the lawyer, Max, leaves him in the death cell, is an extension, with the roles inverted, of this chilling metaphor. Bigger's situation and Bigger himself exert on the mind the same sort of fascination. The premise of the book is, as I take it, clearly conveyed in these first pages: we are confronting a monster created by the American republic and we are, through being made to share his experience, to receive illumination as regards the manner of his life and to feel both pity and horror at his awful and inevitable doom. This is an arresting and potentially rich idea and we would be discussing a very different novel if Wright's execution had been more perceptive and if he had not attempted to redeem a symbolical monster in social terms.

One may object that it was precisely Wright's intention to create in Bigger a social symbol, revelatory of social disease and prophetic of disaster. I think, however, that it is this assumption which we ought to examine more carefully. Bigger has no discernible relationship to himself, to his own life, to his own people, nor to any other people—in this respect, perhaps, he is most American—and his force comes, not from his significance as a social (or anti-social) unit, but from his significance as the incarnation

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of a myth. It is remarkable that, though we follow him step by step from the tenement room to the death cell, we know as little about him when this journey is ended as we did when it began; and, what is even more remarkable, we know almost as little about the social dynamic which we are to believe created him. Despite the details of slum life which we are given, I doubt that anyone who has thought about it, disengaging himself from sentimentality, can accept this most essential premise of the novel for a moment. Those Negroes who surround him, on the other hand, his hard-working mother, his ambitious sister, his poolroom cronies, Bessie, might be considered as far richer and far more subtle and accurate illustrations of the ways in which Negroes are controlled in our society and the complex techniques they have evolved for their survival. We are limited, however, to Bigger's view of them, part of a deliberate plan which might not have been disastrous if we were not also limited to Bigger's perceptions. What this means for the novel is that a necessary dimension has been cut away; this dimension being the relationship that Negroes bear to one another, that depth of involvement and unspoken recognition of shared experience which creates a way of life. What the novel reflects—and at no point interprets—is the isolation of the Negro within his own group and the resulting fury of impatient scorn. It is this which creates its climate of anarchy and unmotivated and unapprehended disaster; and it is this climate, common to most Negro protest novels, which has led us all to believe that in Negro life there exists no tradition, no field of manners, no possibility of ritual or intercourse, such as may, for example, sustain the Jew even after he has left his father's house. But the fact is not that the Negro has no tradition but that there has as yet arrived no sensibility sufficiently profound and tough to make this tradition articulate. For a tradition expresses, after all, nothing more than the long and painful experience of a people; it comes out of the battle waged to maintain their integrity or, to put it more simply, out of their struggle to survive. When we speak of the Jewish tradition we are speaking of centuries of exile and persecution, of the strength which endured and the sensibility which discovered in it the high possibility of the moral victory.

This sense of how Negroes live and how they have so long endured is hidden from us in part by the very speed of the Negro's

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public progress, a progress so heavy with complexity, so bewildering and kaleidoscopic, that he dare not pause to conjecture on the darkness which lies behind him; and by the nature of the American psychology which, in order to apprehend or be made able to accept it, must undergo a metamorphosis so profound as to be literally unthinkable and which there is no doubt we will resist until we are compelled to achieve our own identity by the rigors of a time that has yet to come. Bigger, in the meanwhile, and all his furious kin, serve only to whet the notorious national taste for the sensational and to reinforce all that we now find it necessary to believe. It is not Bigger whom we fear, since his appearance among us makes our victory certain. It is the others, who smile, who go to church, who give no cause for complaint, whom we sometimes consider with amusement, with pity, even with affection—and in whose faces we sometimes surprise the merest arrogant hint of hatred, the faintest, withdrawn, speculative shadow of contempt—who make us uneasy; whom we cajole, threaten, flatter, fear; who to us remain unknown, though we are not (we feel with both relief and hostility and with bottomless confusion) unknown to them. It is out of our reaction to these hewers of wood and drawers of water that our image of Bigger was created.

It is this image, living yet, which we perpetually seek to evade with good works; and this image which makes of all our good works an intolerable mockery. The 'nigger,' black, benighted, brutal, consumed with hatred as we are consumed with guilt, cannot be thus blotted out. He stands at our shoulders when we give our maid her wages, it is his hand which we fear we are taking when struggling to communicate with the current 'intelligent' Negro, his stench, as it were, which fills our mouths with salt as the monument is unveiled in honor of the latest Negro leader. Each generation has shouted behind him, *Nigger!* as he walked our streets; it is he whom we would rather our sisters did not marry; he is banished into the vast and wailing outer darkness whenever we speak of the 'purity' of our women, of the 'sanctity' of our homes, of 'American' ideals. What is more, he knows it. He is indeed the 'native son': he is the 'nigger.' Let us refrain from inquiring at the moment whether or not he actually exists; for we *believe* that he exists. Whenever we encounter him amongst us in the flesh, our faith is made perfect and his necessary and bloody end is executed with a mystical ferocity of joy.

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But there is a complementary faith among the damned which involves their gathering of the stones with which those who walk in the light shall stone them; or there exists among the intolerably degraded the perverse and powerful desire to force into the arena of the actual those fantastic crimes of which they have been accused, achieving their vengeance and their own destruction through making the nightmare real. The American image of the Negro lives also in the Negro's heart; and when he has surrendered to this image life has no other possible reality. Then he, like the white enemy with whom he will be locked one day in mortal struggle, has no means save this of asserting his identity. This is why Bigger's murder of Mary can be referred to as an "act of creation" and why, once this murder has been committed, he can feel for the first time that he is living fully and deeply as a man was meant to live. And there is, I should think, no Negro living in America who has not felt, briefly or for long periods, with anguish sharp or dull, in varying degrees and to varying effect, simple, naked and unanswerable hatred; who has not wanted to smash any white face he may encounter in a day, to violate, out of motives of the cruelest vengeance, their women, to break the bodies of all white people and bring them low, as low as that dust into which he himself has been and is being trampled; no Negro, finally, who has not had to make his own precarious adjustment to the 'nigger' who surrounds him and to the 'nigger' in himself.

Yet the adjustment must be made—rather, it must be attempted, the tension perpetually sustained—for without this he has surrendered his birthright as a man no less than his birthright as a black man. The entire universe is then peopled only with his enemies, who are not only white men armed with rope and rifle, but his own far-flung and contemptible kinsmen. Their blackness is his degradation and it is their stupid and passive endurance which makes his end inevitable.

Bigger dreams of some black man who will weld all blacks together into a mighty fist, and feels, in relation to his family, that perhaps they had to live as they did precisely because none of them had ever done anything, right or wrong, which mattered very much. It is only he who, by an act of murder, has burst the dungeon cell. He has made it manifest that *he* lives and that his despised blood nourishes the passions of a man. He has forced his oppressors to

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see the fruit of that oppression: and he feels, when his family and his friends come to visit him in the death cell, that they should not be weeping or frightened, that they should be happy, *proud* that he has dared, through murder and now through his own imminent destruction, to redeem their anger and humiliation, that he has hurled into the spiritless obscurity of their lives the lamp of his passionate life and death. Henceforth, they may remember Bigger—who has died, as we may conclude, for them. But they do not feel this; they only know that he has murdered two women and precipitated a reign of terror; and that now he is to die in the electric chair. They therefore weep and are honestly frightened—for which Bigger despises them and wishes to "blot" them out. What is missing in his situation and in the representation of his psychology—which makes his situation false and his psychology incapable of development—is any revelatory apprehension of Bigger as one of the Negro's realities or as one of the Negro's roles. This failure is part of the previously noted failure to convey any sense of Negro life as a continuing and complex group reality. Bigger, who cannot function therefore as a reflection of the social illness, having, as it were, no society to reflect, likewise refuses to function on the loftier level of the Christ-symbol. His kinsmen are quite right to weep and be frightened, even to be appalled: for it is not his love for them or for himself which causes him to die, but his hatred and his self-hatred; he does not redeem the pains of a despised people, but reveals, on the contrary, nothing more than his own fierce bitterness at having been born one of them. In this also he is the "native son," his progress determinable by the speed with which the distance increases between himself and the auction-block and all that the auction-block implies. To have penetrated this phenomenon, this inward contention of love and hatred, blackness and whiteness, would have given him a stature more nearly human and an end more nearly tragic; and would have given us a document more profoundly and genuinely bitter and less harsh with an anger which is, on the one hand, exhibited and, on the other hand, denied.

Native Son finds itself at length so trapped by the American image of Negro life and by the American necessity to find the ray of hope that it cannot pursue its own implications. This is why Bigger must be at the last redeemed, to be received, if only by rhetoric, into

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that community of phantoms which is our tenaciously held ideal of the happy social life. It is the socially conscious whites who receive him—the Negroes being capable of no such objectivity—and we have, by way of illustration, that lamentable scene in which Jan, Mary's lover, forgives him for her murder; and, carrying the explicit burden of the novel, Max's long speech to the jury. This speech, which really ends the book, is one of the most desperate performances in American fiction. It is the question of Bigger's humanity which is at stake, the relationship in which he stands to all other Americans—and, by implication, to all people—and it is precisely this question which it cannot clarify, with which it cannot, in fact, come to any coherent terms. He is the monster created by the American republic, the present awful sum of generations of oppression; but to say that he is a monster is to fall into the trap of making him subhuman and he must, therefore, be made representative of a way of life which is real and human in precise ratio to the degree to which it seems to us monstrous and strange. It seems to me that this idea carries, implicitly, a most remarkable confession, that is, that Negro life is in fact as debased and impoverished as our theology claims; and, further, that the use to which Wright puts this idea can only proceed from the assumption—not entirely unsound—that Americans, who evade, so far as possible, all genuine experience, have therefore no way of assessing the experience of others and no way of establishing themselves in relation to any way of life which is not their own. The privacy or obscurity of Negro life makes that life capable, in our imaginations, of producing anything at all; and thus the idea of Bigger's monstrosity can be presented without fear of contradiction, since no American has the knowledge or authority to contest it and no Negro has the voice. It is an idea, which, in the framework of the novel, is dignified by the possibility it promptly affords of presenting Bigger as the herald of disaster, the danger signal of a more bitter time to come when not Bigger alone but all his kindred will rise, in the name of the many thousands who have perished in fire and flood and by rope and torture, to demand their rightful vengeance.

But it is not quite fair, it seems to me, to exploit the national innocence in this way. The idea of Bigger as a warning boomerangs not only because it is quite beyond the limit of probability that

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Negroes in America will ever achieve the means of wreaking vengeance upon the state but also because it cannot be said that they have any desire to do so. *Native Son* does not convey the altogether savage paradox of the American Negro's situation, of which the social reality which we prefer with such hopeful superficiality to study is but, as it were, the shadow. It is not simply the relationship of oppressed to oppressor, of master to slave, nor is it motivated merely by hatred; it is also, literally and morally, a *blood* relationship, perhaps the most profound reality of the American experience, and we cannot begin to unlock it until we accept how very much it contains of the force and anguish and terror of love.

Negroes are Americans and their destiny is the country's destiny. They have no other experience besides their experience on this continent and it is an experience which cannot be rejected, which yet remains to be embraced. If, as I believe, no American Negro exists who does not have his private Bigger Thomas living in the skull, then what most significantly fails to be illuminated here is the paradoxical adjustment which is perpetually made, the Negro being compelled to accept the fact that this dark and dangerous and unloved stranger is part of himself forever. Only this recognition sets him in any wise free and it is this, this necessary ability to contain and even, in the most honorable sense of the word, to *exploit* the 'nigger' which lends to Negro life its high element of the ironic and which causes the most well-meaning of their American critics to make such exhilarating errors when attempting to understand them. To present Bigger as a warning is simply to reinforce the American guilt and fear concerning him, it is most forcefully to limit him to that previously mentioned social arena in which he has no human validity, it is simply to condemn him to death. For he has always been a warning, he represents the evil, the sin and suffering which we are compelled to reject. It is useless to say to the courtroom in which this heathen sits on trial that he is their responsibility, their creation, and his crimes are theirs; and that they ought, therefore, to allow him to live, to make articulate to himself behind the walls of prison the meaning of his existence. The meaning of his existence has already been most adequately expressed, nor does anyone wish, particularly not in the name of democracy, to think of it any more; as for the possibility of articulation, it is this possibility which above all others

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we most dread. Moreover, the courtroom, judge, jury, witnesses and spectators, recognize immediately that Bigger is their creation and they recognize this not only with hatred and fear and guilt and the resulting fury of self-righteousness but also with that morbid fullness of pride mixed with horror with which one regards the extent and power of one's wickedness. They know that death is his portion, that he runs to death; coming from darkness and dwelling in darkness, he must be, as often as he rises, banished, lest the entire planet be engulfed. And they know, finally, that they do not wish to forgive him and that he does not wish to be forgiven; that he dies, hating them, scorning that appeal which they cannot make to that irrecoverable humanity of his which cannot hear it; and that he *wants* to die because he glories in his hatred and prefers, like Lucifer, rather to rule in hell than serve in heaven.

For, bearing in mind the premise on which the life of such a man is based, *i.e.*, that black is the color of damnation, this is his only possible end. It is the only death which will allow him a kind of dignity or even, however horribly, a kind of beauty. To tell this story, no more than a single aspect of the story of the 'nigger,' is inevitably and richly to become involved with the force of life and legend, how each perpetually assumes the guise of the other, creating that dense, many-sided and shifting reality which is the world we live in and the world we make. To tell his story is to begin to liberate us from his image and it is, for the first time, to clothe this phantom with flesh and blood, to deepen, by our understanding of him and his relationship to us, our understanding of ourselves and of all men.

But this is not the story which *Native Son* tells, for we find here merely, repeated in anger, the story which we have told in pride. Nor, since the implications of this anger are evaded, are we ever confronted with the actual or potential significance of our pride; which is why we fall, with such a positive glow of recognition, upon Max's long and bitter summing up. It is addressed to those among us of good will and it seems to say that, though there are whites and blacks among us who hate each other, we will not; there are those who are betrayed by greed, by guilt, by blood lust, but not we; we will set our faces against them and join hands and walk together into that dazzling future when there will be no white or black. This is the dream of all liberal men, a dream not at all dishonorable, but,

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nevertheless, a dream. For, let us join hands on this mountain as we may, the battle is elsewhere. It proceeds far from us in the heat and horror and pain of life itself where all men are betrayed by greed and guilt and blood-lust and where no one's hands are clean. Our good will, from which we yet expect such power to transform us, is thin, passionless, strident: its roots, examined, lead us back to our forebears, whose assumption it was that the black man, to become truly human and acceptable, must first become like us. This assumption once accepted, the Negro in America can only acquiesce in the obliteration of his own personality, the distortion and debasement of his own experience, surrendering to those forces which reduce the person to anonymity and which make themselves manifest daily all over the darkening world.

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William Barrett

AMERICAN FICTION AND AMERICAN VALUES

Suppose we approach the literary production in America during the last decade in a thoroughly American spirit. As Americans we know that the problem of production involves such factors as labor, capital investment, energy, brains and the mastery of technique, and that success in production is nothing but the product of all these quantities together. If we carry through this kind of calculation for our literary enterprise, we should be startled to think that America is not now producing the greatest body of literature in the history of the human race. Certainly, there are now more typewriters tapping, more paper soiled by expectant writers, more brains cudgeled and sweat poured; more writing courses, writing conferences, writing fellowships, critical symposia, critical schools and critical organs; more money made, spent, or lost from writing or matter that resembles writing; than at any time in the past. Reflect on all these varied details in our pursuit, aid, and abetment of literature; realize thus that we Americans expend more energy in the production of literary works than did Periclean Greece, Elizabethan England, or nineteenth-century Russia; and then reflect that within these past ten years America has not produced an *Oedipus,* a *Hamlet,* or a *Brothers Karamazov.* This must be a very painful and embarrassing situation to all Americans whose patriotism is not self-deception, and it calls for a serious effort at explanation.

There are probably many reasons for this literary failure. Some of these we have been discussing for a long time, almost *ad nauseam*: the position of the writer in American society, the newness of our culture and its lack of tradition, the morass of mass culture, and all the other sad and true things that the reader of this magazine must be tired of hearing by this time. It is time we moved on to something deeper. No doubt, one fact to balance our literary bookkeeping above is that not all this prodigious quantity of energy currently expended in America is directed toward the real thing. Our mass media consume millions of words daily, which nobody but a few misguided hacks would think of preserving in books. This distinction between writing and

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literature, however, becomes somewhat obscured in some of the more pretentious efforts where the writer has been able to create a new and ambiguous literary façade: thus a novel a few years back, *The Young Lions* by Irwin Shaw, covers a great sweep of canvas and professes to deal with some major themes in modern life, but in substance is so slick and spurious that we have in it an example of something new in literary history, a kind of make-believe of serious literature. Since America places such a premium upon "know-how" and technique, much energy and real accomplishment goes into producing the efficient surface of good writing, and a great number of agile brains are consumed in this kind of thing, in journalism and books, without having the time to worry whether the substance behind the surface even exists, so that we call the thing literature only for lack of another name. But facts like these only partially explain our ultimate literary shortcomings. However new our circumstances, writers in the past were often alienated, at odds with their society or seduced by it, suffered from debts, poverty and publishers. Life, when urgent and quick in the writer, finds a way of getting over material hindrances. The facts compel us to recognize a deeper cause: that American life itself in this period tends away from the emotional and organic depths out of which the greatest literature has sprung. This generalization bites off a great deal, I am aware; and the rest of what I have to say here must be by way of documenting and qualifying it.

If in his *After the Lost Generation*,[1] Mr. John W. Aldridge had begun with some such line of reasoning as the above, his book would have made much better sense, since the unspoken emotional premise behind his whole argument is a rage of disappointment that a large, vital, and industrious country like the United States is not now producing the great literature that, from all purely rational considerations, we should expect of it. The book attempts to define the present post-war literary generation by a round-up of some of its novelists: Norman Mailer, Irwin Shaw (for his war novel, *The Young Lions*), Burns, Hayes, Merle Miller, Capote, Vidal, Paul Bowles, Frederick Buechner, and others. It may be that Aldridge has moved a little too fast in trying to sum up a generation before it has really got under weigh, but in America these days we travel at great speed, and in intellectual matters too. The American, so far as he is conscious, is engaged everywhere in asking himself who he is; and one sign of our extraordinary self-consciousness as a nation is that we have produced so many books of literary introspection like this one during the past few years. Such books

1. New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1951. $3.00.

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can be useful, and most of them have been genuine in that they have come of a deep-felt sense that we Americans do not yet have enough past to be definite to ourselves; and if they have sometimes been spurious in surrendering to the illusion that this past could be conjured up at will and in a hurry, by talk rather than the arduous processes of life itself, we have on the other hand to remember that no tradition is ever built without all the talk and thought and introspection necessary to define it.

Aldridge's book has attracted a good deal of attention because of its thesis. As the first work of a young critic, it deserves approbation for the vigorous candor of its opinions; but as the study of a literary period it has serious deficiencies: in the rather arbitrary selection of writers considered, the failure to deal adequately with the political and social background without which these writers would not be what they are, and, finally, a superficial treatment of its main problem: the nature and place of values in American life. But these animadversions have been made so compactly and soundly in a brilliant review by Robert Gorham Davis in the New York *Times* that I think it unnecessary to repeat them here. Besides, I am interested here not so much in Aldridge's book for its own sake as in the very important question it raises about our present literary environment and the values of American life as the determinants of this environment.

Aldridge's thesis is that the fiction of the present literary generation suffers from an essential nihilism: since the writer no longer shares with his readers the assumption of a stable set of values, he has come, out of this state of spiritual deprivation, to portray the life around him as futile and meaningless. This current nihilism has its roots in the revolt of the original Lost Generation after the First World War, whose theme and prayer might very well have been that beautiful invocation of Nothingness by the waiter in Hemingway's story, "A Clean Well-Lighted Place"; and, accordingly, Aldridge sets the stage by a critical account of the three novelists of the first Lost Generation—Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Dos Passos—who were the literary fathers of the present. But the despair of the 'twenties was considerably different from what we have now, for their revolt was a passion to the Lost Generation, while that of the present (if we judge from their fiction) is so tame, dispirited, or disorganized that it too has lost its meaning. Here and there Aldridge writes as if he were berating a group of delinquent writers, and naturally enough this is the aspect of the book that *Life* magazine singled out for an encomiastic article; but on the whole he makes no bones about the fact that his accusation incriminates the

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whole nation: *"The best literature in America will continue to be negative so long as the country's values are such that no writer of honesty or insight can possibly take them seriously."*

Now, a lack of values in a writer may be an entirely superfluous diagnosis in a case of plain artistic incompetence, and some of Aldridge's diatribe might have been more accurately directed against downright bad writing. Before grappling, then, with the thorny question of what values did or did not corrupt the past decade, we ought to be sure about its proper literary rating. If we are to weigh the 'forties by the 'twenties, the 'forties will certainly be found wanting—nobody dissents from this judgment, and so nobody seems to raise the necessary qualifications that complicate this comparison. The three most memorable novels to emerge from the last war seem to be: *The Naked and the Dead,* Burns's *The Gallery,* and James Jones's *From Here to Eternity* (which is rightly considered a war book since its subject matter is military and it closes with the bombing of Pearl Harbor). This may look like a pretty thin showing for a whole generation of writers, but one or two things have to be said in its favor in relation to the older decade. Is it altogether certain, for example, that *The Naked and the Dead* is inferior to Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers?* In the 'twenties Hemingway brought to the language of the novel a style whose originality no contemporary can match; yet we should not forget that Hemingway's deliberate stylization is also a sterilization of experience, a refinement away from the complexity of emotion. *The Sun Also Rises* is a tight formal work of art, while John Horne Burns's *The Gallery* is uneven and in many ways a failure; yet Burns is attempting to react to a far more complex experience of Europe, and of the American confrontation of Europe during the war, than Hemingway ever permitted himself to deal with. Beside Hemingway's mastery of a style, *From Here to Eternity* is a great loose sprawl of stenography; yet Jones has the remarkable virtues of the primitive and naive, so that through all his diffuseness and immaturity there break certain types of American character and vitality that never enter Hemingway's stylized world.

But with all such qualifications made, the fact remains that the present generation has produced a literature below the level of the 'twenties, and far below what should be expected of 150 million people living in the most prosperous country in the history of the world. No doubt, a more adequate selection of writers by Aldridge would have made the period look better, but our dissatisfaction with its artistic output would remain. Indeed, some of the books he deals with hardly seem worth being remembered by any lengthy critical comment, except

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by a critic hell-bent to produce a lengthy critical comment on any available material.

All of which brings us back to our initial question: Why are Americans not writing better books? At this point Aldridge introduces the word "values" in token of explanation. To be sure, he remains very vague about the values he intends, but this vagueness is typical of most literary and philosophical discussion of the subject: "values" are an easy halting place, sometimes a camouflage, for what lies beyond them. The highest values may be held in a lifeless and stifling way (as the values of religion by T. S. Eliot); on the other hand, some great artistic periods have been decadent in their morality, and nihilism itself, passionately held, has produced some great fruits. Beyond values there lies the depth of the human commitment and choice from which the values come. The trouble with a novel like Shaw's *The Young Lions,* to revert to our previous example, is that it has, not none, but too many and too obvious values: those of a facile liberalism held from the top of the head and thoroughly false to life. What matters in the end, both for values and for art, is the depth of life as a felt thing; and it is this, and not some intellectual explanation, that is lost whenever we say that the meaning of life has been lost. And if our young writers now experience the life around them as meaningless, it is this meaning they have lost.

Nowadays in America we have new ways of going at this age-old problem of the meaning of life. Some time last year the *Daily News* published in its column "The Inquiring Photographer" an interview in which six people encountered on the streets of New York City were asked, "What are you living for?" This interview was more instructive about modern life and the question of values than any academic article published in the philosophical journals for that year. The confusion of the answers was to be expected, more remarkable was the willingness of these Americans to live in open confrontation of the question and their confusion about it; and perhaps most remarkable of all that the question itself should be asked with such open-air and democratic directness in the pages of the *Daily News.* A hundred or a few hundred years ago nobody could have been stopped on the streets for this purpose: ordinary people did not worry in public about the meaning of life so long as they knew the answer handed to them by acknowledged authority; but today in America, if the *Daily News* is evidence, we have become so radically committed to democracy that each individual is expected to live through this question for himself. This is the key to our situation in America: the apparent absence of values is in fact

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an immense groping, often confused and at odds with itself and even anti-humanistic in its actual directions, but in its intentions real and positive nevertheless.

Obviously, then, it is grappling with Proteus to try to sum up American values in any simple formula. The question divides and subdivides again, and has almost to be examined separately at each level of our society.

Beginning from the bottom, what we find persistently remarkable about our current fiction is that the affirmative values are usually found in the characters of the lower classes. The roots of this lie deep in the American past, but here we need not go back beyond Faulkner, in whom the dumb and the inarticulate and the primitive are almost always the characters with the deepest and most positive adherence to life. James Jones's enlisted men are *lumpen* characters, but they are also bursting with a positive energy of life, in comparison with which the officers and their middle-class wives appear decadent and corrupt. Mailer's G.I.'s, however coarsened and degraded by their experience, are vital and real human beings; but when Mailer wants to create a character of some intellectual awareness, in whom values would be held in conscience and self-consciousness, he can only give us his Lieutenant Hearn, a futile and drifting nursling of the middle class with a vacuum at his heart. In American fiction the values seem to become uncertain when they are to be held consciously; and therefore the educated middle classes appear as the social stratum where nihilism has made its chief inroads.

Our middle class has become such a fluid and uncertain thing that we have, significantly, to go back beyond the present generation, for an accurate novelist of the social manners of this class: J. P. Marquand is the nearest thing we have to such a social novelist, and his novels make up a prolonged and ambiguous lament over the death of the heart of our older middle class. The Marquand bourgeoisie, while still attached to them, finds the old ideals of its class harder to justify amid the scramble of modern life: against the amoral, hard-driving, and cosmopolitan life of New York the code of old New England looks very paradoxical indeed. Within the limits of his talent and material, Marquand is one of the best observers we have, and the historical fact implicit in his novels is confirmed by such recent social analyses as those of David Riesman. From old Boston to New York (substitute any other high-strung urban area, like Washington and Hollywood)—such is the spiritual journey of the American middle class, in the course of which this class may have become more clever and sophisticated, but also more brittle, violent, hard-drinking, neurotic and nihilistic.

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New York, of course, is the nightmare from which we are all trying to awaken. But New York is also only America become thoroughly urban, high-strung, and nakedly honest about the most powerful drives in American life. Here the middle class as a moral entity disappears into the middle-income bracket, there being nothing left to characterize a class but its money, and the only value universally discernible is that of being desperately on the make. New York as a whole has yet to be done in fiction, it is too many worlds at once; and possibly the emptiest novel during the last decade was Merle Miller's *That Winter,* which dealt with the drinking, fornication, and petty despair of the young careerists in midtown Manhattan. There would be no point at all in remembering Miller's novel except that it illustrates its period and place, and Aldridge so memorializes it as one of the plainest statements of general futility. But the real message of the book is something quite different from this: Miller's values are really the values of making a career in midtown, but he lies about them because, when he sits down to write, he remembers serious literature with its older human norms and so must condemn the lives in his novel as futile. For the thousands of Americans who come every year to New York to take their chances in Miller's world, success, sociability, and drinking are the values that American life, stripped of all hypocrisy, provides; and these are no moral monsters, but people we all know, quite typical Americans who take life very much as they find it, and unless they crack up, most of them survive without ever needing any other values; as America itself, unless it cracks, may yet succeed in doing.

In the midst of this strange but very representative island of American civilization we come upon *The New Yorker,* a magazine of many paradoxes, whose fiction Aldridge scores as one of the most deleterious literary influences of our time. However that may be, this fiction does tell its own truth about American life. One of the paradoxes of *The New Yorker* is that it has very little relation to the city from which it takes its name: fifty-two weeks a year this magazine, struggling bravely to affirm its gentle values of urbanity, good manners, and civilized good humor against the roaring life of New York, resembles a man in a Brooks Brothers suit walking into the teeth of a gale. And every week, alongside the brave editorial affirmations, in the hard little cameos of stories we meet the faceless and nameless people who are earning more than ten thousand dollars a year and dying of emotional anaemia: snapshots of the nihilism of a middle class bored with itself, tepid in its emotions, fighting the uncertain battle of cocktail parties, divorces, and fragile family memories. One is tempted to say that the stories in *The New Yorker* show what the values of *The*

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New Yorker become when exposed to the rough edges of American life.

Thus wherever they crop up in recent literature, as in Marquand and *The New Yorker,* the traditional norms appear to be at bay. This appearance, is, I believe, a reality, our fiction is social fact, and for the very simple reason that the real values of America, whether or not Americans themselves always know it, represent a radical break with tradition. America may not yet be an entirely new civilization, but it contains in itself the seeds of such, a fact which most of us recognize only intermittently and usually when we are in conflict with the new life of this continent because of some more traditional background. It is only natural then that Americans are confused about their values and that our writers stammer in trying to express this confusion. Though this situation is new, something like it has occurred in the past, and a relevant comparison can be made with the position of the Russian writers of the last century: they too were unsure of themselves in a culture that they felt as raw and unformed in relation to the developed cultures of Western Europe, and they too groped for an identity, in dreadful haste to assimilate Western Europe and in even more dreadful conflict about the assimilation. And they produced Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. We can hardly expect a Tolstoy or Dostoevsky in America when the deepest experience of these writers is not an organic and recognized part of American life: our extrovert civilization has developed other means of adjusting to life without their spiritual struggles. We have the crack-up and the breakdown, neurosis and maladjustment, but we do not have the tragic sense of life. Of course, a society does not exist in order to produce a literature, and the American sense of life may yet succeed in founding a civilization superior in many ways to anything in the past: I do not argue these matters, but only that from what we have so far been able to see the literature of such a new civilization is not likely to be able to compete in interest with that of the past. The American sense of life, however, being new, may very well develop into something quite different from what we know; it may not even survive: remember that America in this respect merely continues along the path on which Europe itself was headed until the upheavals of recent history brought it face to face with the abysses of human existence that a facile rationalism had let itself forget.

Something like this, I imagine, was what Aldridge was trying to get at in his book, and his failure to get it right may be in good part due to the fact that he makes so much of his case turn about the bad little boys of our literature—Capote, Vidal, Bowles, Merle Miller—whose

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adolescent and neurotic material never provides the slightest inkling of all the good and solid American lives being lived all over the nation. Now, it is just these decent and solid American lives that I wish to place in question here, so far as the purposes of literature are concerned; and if I were to choose a single book to support my thesis, it would be a novel like James Gould Cozzens' *Guard of Honor* (which Aldridge in any case should have included as a war book), a work "positive" enough in its values to win the acclaim of even so staunch a guardian of the public virtues as Bernard De Voto. Cozzens shows an amazingly competent grasp of the machinery of fiction, his story runs ahead smoothly on very little fuel, and his characters are recognizably real Americans that we have all met one time or another in our lives. But the book will have no permanent place in our literature: it lacks depth, its characters are the kind of decent and struggling Americans whose perplexities about life are only practical problems to be solved, while the ultimate or primitive things, never articulated and faced, are hardly more than faint shadows in the background.

Sex may be the deepest, it is certainly the most sensational subject in our novels that has to do with values. In its sexual codes the America of 1950 is certainly a different civilization from the America of 1900. Our novels now deal with sex frankly as a matter of course; and such frankness is hardly a matter of mere literary convention, but a part of the changed *mores*, a consequence of the deeper fact that sexual freedom itself is now taken for granted and therefore cannot be for us the thrill that it was, in its newness, for the original Lost Generation of the 'twenties. This may be why sex in some quarters has lost its value, so that we encounter the interesting phenomenon of *nihilism in the bedroom*: a novel like *Anna Karenina*, for example, could hardly be written nowadays; if we were to have a tragedy of sex at all, it could not be in this form, for all the rules of the game have changed. One profound sign of this devaluation of sex is the figure of the homosexual, as the sexual grotesque, looming very large in our recent literature. But one need not go to homosexual fiction to discover that the relation between man and woman does not play the same part in life it once did: *From Here to Eternity* is in this respect a perfectly indicative book; if Jones is an adolescent about women, his adolescence is nevertheless very American, and there is more than private meaning in the fact that the significant human relations in his novel are between man and man, those between man and woman being in the long run much less important for either party concerned. But here again we are grappling with Proteus when we try to sum up American values, for part of our sexual

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unrest is that we have higher human ambitions for sex than Europe ever realized; and amid all the desperate experimentation, here and there one discerns signs of something positive. The trouble, for ourselves and our novelists, is that the rules have been so radically changed that nobody seems to know what they are, and most of us have to discover our own only after considerable anguish and instability.

With all these changes going on, we should not be surprised that the voice of traditionalism has become so loud in the last decade. Perhaps there is no clearer sign of the possibilities of a radical break with the past inherent in our civilization: when change seems too threatening, some people have to protect themselves from becoming giddy by clinging to the ready-made structures of the past. Hence the coteries of traditionalist intellectuals now proliferate all over the country, and the shadow of T. S. Eliot is long upon the land. The traditionalists have been valuable against some of the shallower aspects of American life, but they would be more valuable still if their devotion to tradition were not always a one-sided adherence to tradition already made rather than one in the process of making itself. Since they cut themselves off thus from the possibilities of American development, their writings show progressively less relation to the realities of life in this country. American civilization, in some of its tendencies, may exist in total error; that is the conviction held here too; but we have to temper this judgment by the memory that every civilization in the past existed in its own form of falsehood. To sum up: what has happened in America is that democracy has become, more than a mere political form, a positive *ethos* permeating the whole society, from the bottom up, and therefore has also come to involve a bold experimentation with life itself and with the traditional human norms in which the life of the past sought to contain itself. To avoid historical short-sightedness, we have to remember that the breakdown in traditional norms we are currently living through was something brewing for a very long time within European civilization itself, to become acute in the period 1870 to 1939. All this suggests that the word "breakdown," though it has such menacing overtones, may also denote the clearing away of a rigid structure that was doomed to death anyway. As a civilization, we are in mid-passage; and what we Americans will be like when we have lived through our tragedy, nobody can predict now.

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Randall Jarrell

A VIEW OF THREE POETS

Richard Wilbur is a delicate, charming, and skillful poet—his poems not only make you use, but make you eager to use, words like *attractive* and *appealing* and *engaging*. His poems are often gay and often elegiac—almost professionally elegiac, sometimes; funny or witty; individual; beautiful or at least pretty; accomplished in their rhymes and rhythms and language. Somebody said about Christopher Fry—and almost anybody must have felt it—"I don't think real poetry is ever as *poetic* as this." One feels this way about some of Mr. Wilbur's language (and about some of what he says, too; what poets say is often just part of their language); but generally his language has a slight incongruity or "offness," a skillful use of verbs and kinesthetic words, a relishable relishing texture, a sugar-coated-slap-in-the-face rhetoric, that produce a real though rather mild pleasure. The reader notices that the poet never gets so lost either in his subject or in his emotions that he forgets to mix in his usual judicious proportion of all these things; his manners and manner never fail.

Mr. Wilbur seems to be a naturally lyric or descriptive poet. His book[1] is rather like a picture gallery—he often mentions painters—and his people are usually not much more than portions of landscapes or still-lifes. The poems are all Scenes, none of them dramatic; and if the reader is someone who feels that you can't look at the best sunset for more than a few minutes (but that people sometimes last for centuries), he is sure to start longing for a murder or a Character—after thirty or forty pages he would pay dollars for one dramatic monologue, some blessed graceless human voice that has not yet learned to express itself so composedly as poets do.

When you read "The Death of a Toad," a poem that begins *A toad the power mower caught,/ Chewed and clipped of a leg, with a hobbling hop has got/ To the garden verge,* you stop to shudder at the raw being of the world, at all that *a hobbling hop* has brought to life—*that* toad is real, all right. But when you read on, when Mr. Wilbur says that the toad *dies/ Toward some deep monotone,/ Toward misted and ebullient seas/ And cooling shores, toward lost Amphibia's emperies,* you think with a surge of irritation and dismay, "So it was

1. *Ceremony and Other Poems.* Harcourt, Brace. $2.50.

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all only an excuse for some Poetry." And when you read Mr. Wilbur's "Beowulf," the poem seems about as convincing and appropriate as Marie Laurencin illustrations to the *Iliad*. Yet the same poet can say to a sycamore,

Sycamore, trawled by the tilt sun,
Still scrawl your trunk with tattered lights, and keep
The spotted toad upon your patchy bark,
Baffle the sight to sleep,
Be such a deep
Rapids of lacing light and dark . . .

and can say about olive trees in the "heavy jammed excess" of southern France,

Even when seen from near, the olive shows
A hue of far away. Perhaps for this
The dove brought olive back, a tree that grows
Unearthly pale, which ever dims and dries,
And whose great thirst, exceeding all excess,
Teaches the South it is not paradise.

These quotations seem to me to have an easy and graceful beauty; and one is delighted with the wit and delicacy of a passage like

. . . Tom Swift has vanished too,

Who worked at none but wit's expense
Putting dirigibles together
Out in the yard, in the quiet weather,
Whistling beyond Tom Sawyer's fence.

When someone apostrophizes an eggplant: "Natural pomp! Excessive Nightshade's Prince! Polished potato," or says about a bird's nest fallen from a tree, "Oh risk hallowed eggs, oh/ Triumph of lightness! Legerity begs no/ Quarter: my Aunt Virginia, when"—when anybody speaks so, you say to him: "Good old Marianne Moore! Isn't she *wonderful?*" But Mr. Wilbur is not influenced by her any more; I wish he were. His second book seems more affected by general Victorian poetic practice than by any live poet; the reader sometimes thinks in surprise, "Why would anybody *want* to write like that?" An ambitious and felt and thoughtful poem like his first book's "Water-Walker" (an animal-morality poem about St. Paul; it, like Elizabeth Bishop's beautiful animal-morality poem about St. Peter, is a member of a genre that Miss Moore discovered and perfected) is a partial failure, but surely anybody would rather have written it than some of Mr. Wilbur's slight and conventional successes.

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Most of his poetry consents too easily, with innocent complacence, to its own unnecessary limitations. Once an unusually reflective halfback told me that as a run develops there will sometimes be a moment when you can "settle for six or eight yards, or else take a chance and get stopped cold or, if you're lucky, go the whole way." Mr. Wilbur almost always settles for six or eight yards; and so many reviewers have praised him for this that in his second book he takes fewer risks than in his first. (He is one of those Southern girls to whom everybody north of Baltimore has said, "Whatever you do, *don't* lose that lovely Southern accent of yours"; after a few years they sound like Amos and Andy.) If I were those reviewers I would quote to Mr. Wilbur something queer and true that Blake said on the same subject: "You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough." Mr. Wilbur never goes too far, but he never goes far enough. In the most serious sense of the word he is not a very satisfactory poet. And yet he seems the best of the quite young poets writing in this country, poets considerably younger than Lowell and Bishop and Shapiro and Schwartz; I want to finish by admiring his best poems, not by complaining about their limitations. But I can't blame his readers if they say to him in encouraging impatient voices: "Come on, *take a chance!*" If you never look *just* wrong to your contemporaries you will never look just right to posterity—every writer has to be, to some extent, sometimes, a law unto himself.

Since Robert Lowell's *The Mills of the Kavanaughs*[2] consists of only seven poems—one tremendously long, four quite sizeable—I can treat them one by one. "The Fat Man in the Mirror" makes a better impression on you if you haven't read the strange and beautiful Werfel poem on which it is based; this "imitation after Werfel"—never was anything less imitative!—is a baroque, febrile, Horowitz-Variations-on-the-Stars-and-Stripes-Forever affair. Part I of "Her Dead Brother" is a restrained, sinister, and extremely effective poem; the suicide-by-gas-stove Part II is effective in some portions, but is mannered and violent—Part I seems better off as the separate poem that it originally was. It would be hard to write, read, or imagine a more nightmarish poem than "Thanksgiving's Over"—on one level it is a complete success, and it is almost with a sigh of relief that one concludes that it does not succeed on another level, that all this is the possible with which art does not have to deal, not the probable with which it must. Still, it is a frightening and impressive—and in parts very moving—

2. Harcourt, Brace. $2.50.

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poem which anybody will want to read. The organization and whole conception of "David and Bathsheba in the Public Garden" are so mannered and idiosyncratic, so peculiar to Mr. Lowell, that the poem is spoiled, in spite of parts as beautiful as that about the harvest moon. Someone is sure to say about this poem that you can't tell David from Bathsheba without a program: they both (like the majority of Mr. Lowell's characters) talk just like Mr. Lowell.

I cannot think of any objection at all to "Mother Marie Therese" and "Falling Asleep over the Aeneid," and if I could I would be too overawed to make it. "Mother Marie Therese" is the best poem Mr. Lowell has ever written, and "Falling Asleep over the Aeneid" is almost as good; *very* few living poets have written poems that surpass these. "Mother Marie Therese" is the most human and tender, the least specialized, of all Mr. Lowell's poems; it is warped neither by Doctrine nor by that doctrine which each of us becomes for himself; in it, for once, Mr. Lowell really gets out of himself. Sometimes the New Brunswick nun who is talking does sound like a not-too-distant connection of the Lowells, but generally she seems as much herself as porpoise-bellied Father Turbot, "his bald spot tapestried by colored glass," sounds like himself when he squeaks: "N-n-nothing is so d-dead/ As a dead S-s-sister." Certainly Father Turbot is real; the drowned Mother Superior ("reading Rabelais from her chaise,/ Or parroting the *Action Française";* she who "half-renounced by Candle, Book, and Bell,/ Her flowers and fowling-pieces for the church"; she who saw that our world is passing, but "whose trust/ Was in its princes") is real; but the sixty-year-old nun who speaks the poem in grief for her is most real of all. One can judge something of *her* reality and of the quality of the poem simply by looking at the long passage with which the poem ends:

> *The bell-buoy, whom she called the Cardinal,*
> *Dances upon her. If she hears at all,*
> *She only hears it tolling to this shore,*
> *Where our frost-bitten sisters know the roar*
> *Of water, inching, always on the move*
> *For virgins, when they wish the times were love,*
> *And their hysterical hosannahs rouse*
> *The loveless harems of the buck ruffed grouse*
> *Who drums, untroubled now, beside the sea—*
> *As if he found our stern virginity*
> Contra naturam. *We are ruinous;*
> *God's Providence through time has mastered us:*

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Now all the bells are tongueless, now we freeze,
A later advent, pruner of warped trees,
Whistles about our nunnery slabs, and yells,
And water oozes from us into wells;
A new year swells and stirs. Our narrow Bay
Freezes itself and us. We cannot say
Christ even sees us, when the ice floes toss
His statue, made by Hurons, on the cross
That Father Turbot sank on Mother's mound—
A whirligig! Mother, we must give ground,
Little by little; but it does no good.
Tonight, while I am piling on more driftwood,
And stooping with the poker, you are here,
Telling your beads; and breathing in my ear,
You watch your orphan swording at her fears.
I feel you twitch my shoulder. No one hears
Us mock the sisters, as we used to, years
And years behind us, when we heard the spheres
Whirring venite; *and we held our ears.*
My mother's hollow sockets fill with tears.

"Falling Asleep over the Aeneid" is as good—and as thoroughly and surprisingly organized—a poem about power and the self as any I can recall. Its subject matter and peculiar circumstances justify the harshness and violence, the barbarous immediacy, that often seem arbitrary in Mr. Lowell's poems; and these are set off by passages as tender and beautiful as this description of the dead Pallas:

Face of snow,
You are the flower that country girls have caught,
A wild bee-pillaged honey-suckle brought
To the returning bridegroom—the design
Has not yet left it, and the petals shine;
The earth, its mother, has, at last, no help:
It is itself.

I have rarely had more of a sense of the terrible continuity of the world (and of the ego that learns neither from itself nor from the world what the dead face is made to tell Aeneas: "Brother, try,/ O child of Aphrodite, try to die:/ To die is life") than when I read the conclusion into which all the terms of the poem coalesce:

Church is over, and its bell
Frightens the yellowhammers, as I wake
And watch the whitecaps wrinkle up the lake.

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Mother's great-aunt, who died when I was eight,
Stands by our parlor sabre. "Boy, it's late.
Vergil must keep the Sabbath." Eighty years!
It all comes back. My Uncle Charles appears,
Blue-capped and bird-like. Phillips Brooks and Grant
Are frowning at his coffin, and my aunt,
Hearing his colored volunteers parade
Through Concord, laughs, and tells her English maid
To clip his yellow nostril hairs, and fold
His colors on him. . . . It is I, I hold
His sword to keep from falling, for the dust
On the stuffed birds is breathless, for the bust
Of young Augustus weighs on Vergil's shelf:
It scowls into my glasses at itself.

I am not sure how good this passage will seem in isolation; as the ending of this poem, an ending with every term prepared for, every symbol established, it is as magnificent as it is final.

"The Mills of the Kavanaughs," the long narrative poem that fills half the book, is an interesting and powerful poem; but in spite of having wonderful lines and sections—many of both—it does not seem to me successful as a unified work of art, a narrative poem that makes the same sort of sense a novel or story makes. It is too much a succession of nightmares and daydreams that are half-nightmare; one counts with amusement and disbelief the number of times the poem becomes a nightmare-vision or its equivalent. And these are only too successfully nightmarish, so that there is a sort of monotonous violence and extremity about the poem, as if it were a piece of music that consisted of nothing but climaxes. The people too often seem to be acting *in the manner of* Robert Lowell, rather than plausibly as real people act (or implausibly as real people act). I doubt that many readers will think them real; the husband of the heroine never seems so, and the heroine is first of all a sort of symbiotic state of the poet. (You feel, "Yes, Robert Lowell would act like this if he were a girl"; but whoever saw a girl like Robert Lowell?)

Occasionally, for a few lines, the poem becomes so academic and clumsy that one is astonished: "My husband was a fool/ To run out from the Navy when disgrace/ Still wanted zeal to look him in the face." I do not believe that even Cotton Mather ever managed to think in the style of that last line. If I quote a similar passage— "Soon enough we saw/ Death like the Bourbon after Waterloo,/ Who learning and forgetting nothing, knew/ Nothing but ruin. Why must we

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mistrust/ Ourselves with Death who takes the world on trust?/ Although God's brother, and himself a god,/ Death whipped his horses through the startled sod;/ For neither conscience nor omniscience warned/ Him from his folly, when the virgin scorned/ His courtship, and the quaking earth revealed/ Death's desperation to the Thracian field"—and then tell the reader that these rather labored and academic lines are three-fourths of the *last stanza* of the poem, I won't blame him for looking unbelieving.

The poem is hurt very much by being a sort of anthology of favorite Lowell effects—situations are repeated, there is even a passage adapted from an earlier poem; the reader gets confused and thinks, "Am I in 'Her Dead Brother' now? Here's the stove, but where's the suicide? Isn't this 'David and Bathsheba' now?" What Mr. Lowell is attempting to do in this poem is often beyond his powers and knowledge (where narrative verse is concerned everybody alive is an amateur, though Frost was a professional thirty years ago); usually the poet is having to try much too hard, so that one does not feel very often in this poem the spontaneity, the live half-accidental half-providential rightness, that some of the best poetry has or seems to have. Sometimes Mr. Lowell is having great difficulties, and the rest of the time he is seeking refuge from them in some of the effects that he has produced so well and so often before.

He is a poet of both Will and Imagination, but his Will is always seizing his Imagination by the shoulders and saying to it in a grating voice: "Don't sit there fooling around; *get to work!*"—and his poor Imagination gets tense all over and begins to revolve determinedly and familiarly, like a squirrel in a squirrel-cage. Goethe talked about the half-somnambulistic state of the poet; but Mr. Lowell too often is either having a nightmare or else is wide awake gritting his teeth and working away at All The Things He Does Best. Cocteau said to poets: *Learn what you can do and then don't do it;* and this is true—we do it enough without trying. As a poet Mr. Lowell sometimes doesn't have enough trust in God and tries to do everything himself: he proposes *and* disposes—and this helps to give a certain monotony to his work. But probably the reader will want to say to me, by now, what Lincoln said about the drunkard Grant: "If I knew his brand I would order my other generals a barrel." And I have put my objections to his long poem rather too strongly; it is a powerful and impressive poem, with a good many beautiful or touching passages and a great many overwhelming ones, one of the better poems of one of the best of living poets.

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Paterson (*Book I*) seemed to me a wonderful poem; I should not have supposed beforehand that William Carlos Williams could do the organizing and criticizing and selecting that a work of this length requires. Of course, Book I is not organized quite so well as a long poem *ought* to be, but this is almost a defining characteristic of long poems—and I do not see how anyone could do better using only those rather mosaic organizational techniques that Dr. Williams employs, and neglecting as much as he does narrative, drama, logic, and sustained movement, the primary organizers of long poems. I waited for the next three books of *Paterson* more or less as you wait for someone who has gone to break the bank at Monte Carlo for the second, third, and fourth times; I was afraid that I knew what was going to happen, but I kept wishing as hard as I could that it wouldn't.

Now that Book IV has been printed[3], one can come to some conclusions about *Paterson* as a whole. My first conclusion is this: it doesn't seem to *be* a whole; my second: *Paterson* has been getting rather steadily worse. Most of Book IV is much worse than II and III, and neither of them even begins to compare with Book I. Book IV is so disappointing that I do not want to write about it at any length: it would not satisfactorily conclude even a quite mediocre poem. Both form and content often seem a parody of those of the "real" *Paterson;* many sections have a scrappy inconsequence, an arbitrary irrelevance, that is extraordinary; poetry of the quality of that in Book I is almost completely lacking—though the forty lines about a new Odysseus coming in from the sea are particularly good, and there are other fits and starts of excellence. There are in Part III long sections of a measure that sounds exactly like the stuff you produce when you are demonstrating to a class that any prose whatsoever can be converted into four-stress accentual verse simply by inserting line-endings every four stresses. These sections *look* like blank verse, but are flatter than the flattest blank verse I have ever read—for instance: "Branching trees and ample gardens gave/ the village streets a delightful charm and/ the narrow old-fashioned brick walls added/ a dignity to the shading trees. It was a fair/ resort for summer sojourners on their way/ to the Falls, the main object of interest." This passage suggests that the guidebook of today is the epic of tomorrow; and a more awing possibility, the telephone book put into accentual verse, weighs upon one's spirit.

Books II and III are much better than this, of course: Book II is decidedly what people call "a solid piece of work," but most of the magic is gone. And one begins to be very doubtful about the organization:

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should there be so much of the evangelist and his sermon? Should so much of this book consist of what are—the reader is forced to conclude —real letters from a real woman? One reads these letters with involved, embarrassed pity, quite as if she had walked into the room and handed them to one. What has been done to them to make it possible for us to respond to them as art and not as raw reality? to make them part of the poem *Paterson?* I can think of no answer except: *They have been copied out on the typewriter.* Anyone can object, *But the context makes them part of the poem;* and anyone can reply to this objection, *It takes a lot of context to make somebody else's eight-page letter the conclusion to a book of a poem.*

Book II introduces—how one's heart sinks!—Credit and Usury, those enemies of man, God, and contemporary long poems. Dr. Williams has always put up a sturdy resistance to Pound when Pound has recommended to him St. Sophia or the Parthenon, rhyme or metre, European things like that; yet he takes Credit and Usury over from Pound and gives them a good home and maintains them in practically the style to which they have been accustomed—his motto seems to be, *I'll adopt your child if only he's ugly enough.* It is interesting to see how much some later parts of *Paterson* resemble in their structure some middle and later parts of the *Cantos*: the Organization of Irrelevance (or, perhaps, the Irrelevance of Organization) suggests itself as a name for this category of structure. Such organization is *ex post facto* organization: if something is somewhere, one can always find Some Good Reason for its being there, but if it had not been there would one reader have missed it? if it had been put somewhere else, would one reader have guessed where it should have "really" gone? Sometimes these anecdotes, political remarks, random comments seem to be where they are for one reason: because Dr. Williams chose—happened to choose—for them to be there. One is reminded of that other world in which Milton found Chance "sole arbiter."

Book III is helped very much by the inclusion of "Beautiful Thing," that long, extremely effective lyric that was always intended for *Paterson;* and Book III, though neither so homogeneous nor so close to Book I, is in some respects superior to Book II. But all three later books are worse organized, more eccentric and idiosyncratic, more self-indulgent, than the first. And yet that is not the point, the real point: the *poetry,* the lyric rightness, the queer wit, the improbable and dazzling perfection of so much of Book I have disappeared—or at least, reappear only fitfully. Early in Book IV, while talking to his son, Dr. Williams quotes

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this to him: "What I miss, said your mother, is the poetry, the pure poem of the first parts." She is right.

I have written (sometimes in *Partisan Review*) a good deal about Dr. Williams' unusual virtues, so I will take it for granted that I don't need to try to demonstrate, all over again, that he is one of the best poets alive. He was the last of the good poets of his generation to become properly appreciated; and some of his appreciators, in the blush of conversion, rather overvalue him now. When one reads that no "living American poet has written anything better and more ambitious" than *Paterson,* and that Dr. Williams is a poet who gives us "just about everything," one feels that the writer has in some sense missed the whole point of William Carlos Williams. He is a *very* good but *very* limited poet, particularly in vertical range. He is a notably unreasoning, intuitive writer—is not, of course, an intellectual at all, in either the best or the worst sense of the word; and he has further limited himself by volunteering for and organizing a long dreary imaginary war in which America and the Present are fighting against Europe and the Past. But go a few hundred years back inside the most American American and it is Europe: Dr. Williams is just as much Darkest Europe as any of us, way down there in the middle of his past.

In his long one-sided war with Eliot Dr. Williams seems to me to come off surprising badly—particularly so when we compare the whole of *Paterson* with the *Four Quartets.* When we read the *Four Quartets* we are reading the long poem of a poet so temperamentally isolated that he does not even put another character, another human being treated at length, into the whole poem; and yet the poem (probably the best since the *Duino Elegies*) impresses us not with its limitations but with its range and elevation, with how much it knows not simply about men but about Man—not simply about one city or one country but about the West, that West of which America is no more than the last part.

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BOOKS

KEATS IN HIS LETTERS

THE SELECTED LETTERS OF JOHN KEATS. Edited by Lionel Trilling. Farrar, Straus and Young. $3.50.

This volume is a model example of what the Great Letters series should be. All the important letters are included and without cuts; following the Maurice Buxton Forman edition of 1931, the letters are printed in their original spelling and punctuation, which is more important than one might think, for normalization of such matters ruins Keats's peculiar epistolary style; the footnotes are helpful and modest, and Professor Trilling's introduction is, for its length, one of the best essays on Keats that I have read. Against certain of the Romantic writers the charges of moral wooliness and self-idolatry brought by Irving Babbitt and others are, I believe, legitimate, but I fully share Professor Trilling's conviction that Keats is not among them.

The distinction which Keats drew between the poet who is unpoetical because he has no identity of his own and poetical things like the sun, the moon, and men and women who are creatures of impulse and action, is applicable to people's letters, including his own. There are two kinds of letters, those in which the writer is in control of his situation—what he writes about it is what he chooses to write—and those in which the situation dictates what he writes. The terms personal and impersonal are here ambiguous; the first kind of letter is impersonal in so far as the writer is looking at himself in the world as if he were a third person but personal in so far as it is his personal act so to look—the signature to the letter is really his and he is responsible for its contents; vice versa, the second kind is personal in that the writer is identical with what he writes, but impersonal in that it is the situation not he which enforces that identity.

The second kind are what journalists call 'human documents' and most of the letters written by Keats after his first serious hemorrhage belong to it. I am not sorry that they have been published but I am sorry that they were not published anonymously, for in them Keats has, as it were, ceased to be a poet and become a poetic subject, human nature in an extreme existential situation of suffering and despair. Phrases like "You must be mine to die upon the rack if I want you" or "You may have altered—if you have not—if you still behave in

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dancing rooms and other societies as I have seen you—I do not want to live," or "I should like to die. I am sickened at the brute world which you are smiling with. I hate men and women more," strike the heart with pity and fear; nobody but a priggish fool would censure the man who wrote them for they themselves pass judgment on our "poor impassioned clay."

Any discussion of Keats's letters, therefore, should confine itself to those written before February 3, 1820.

I wonder if school children are still taught, as I was, the ridiculous myth that Keats was killed by a bad review. I wonder, furthermore, how much Shelley, who is largely responsible for it, actually believed what he wrote in *Adonais;* one cannot help suspecting that subconscious jealousy of Keats's superior gifts and resentment at his lack of admiration for Shelley's own poetry played a role in his portrait of Keats as a lovable weakling, a sort of male and literary *Dame aux Camélias.* Had it been true, Byron's sneers in *Don Juan* would have been fully deserved, but both the poems and the letters prove it to be a fantastic distortion.

Adonais is a sensitive plant without an idea in his head; Keats's mind, on the other hand, was a rare combination of witty and original intelligence with common sense. There are lines in his poetry with which one can find fault, there are statements in his letters which one may wish to question, but I cannot remember anything in either which one could call just silly. There are very few poets of any period—none of Keats's contemporaries are among them—of whom this can be said. Even the two sentences for which he has most frequently been attacked, the conclusion of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and the "O for a life of Sensations rather than Thoughts" in the letter to Bailey have only to be read in their context to see that they do not mean what their hostile critics say they mean.

A small but revealing example of Keats's maturity of outlook is his political attitude. Politics is a subject upon which poets are peculiarly liable to make asses of themselves. Keats moved in a circle with strong liberal views and a young man of twenty-three might most excusably have became hot-headed and exaggerated in his expressions; in fact, the few political comments that he does make are extraordinarily cool and sensible.

Nothwithstanding the part which the Liberals take in the Cause of Napoleon I cannot but think he has done more harm to the life of Liberty than anyone else could have done; not that the divine right Gentlemen have done or intend to do any good—no they have taken a

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Lesson of him, and will do all the further harm he would have done without any of the good—The worst thing he has done is, that he has taught them how to organise their monstrous armies.

This maturity seems all the more remarkable when one considers his lack of educational or social advantages. Like Blake, he attended neither a public school nor a university, and his circle of friends could hardly be described as distinguished, either artistically or socially—his family, a curate, a clerk in an insurance office, a navy Pay Officer. The only 'names' he knew intimately were the painter Benjamin Haydon, who was dotty and unsuccessful, and Leigh Hunt whom everybody, Keats included, seems to have found a ridiculous bore.

He understands many a beautiful thing; but then, instead of giving other minds credit for the same degree of perception as he himself possesses—he begins an explanation in such a serious manner that our taste and self-love is offended continually. Hunt does one harm by making fine things pretty and beautiful things hateful—Through him I am indifferent to Mozart, I care not for white Busts—and many a glorious thing when associated with him becomes a nothing.

Given Keats's age and gifts this confinement to the outskirts of literary and social life was probably advantageous. It is always dangerous for a young writer to be taken up by the fashionable world before he has discovered his own values, and a mind which is original and self-critical often finds the company of those among whom, because they are not its intellectual equal, it is not afraid to think aloud, more helpful than one more brilliant. Many of the famous passages in the letters on art and life seem just such thinking aloud, *i.e.,* they are not addressed to anyone in particular; had he been writing to someone else at the moment, another correspondent would have received them. As time went on, however, one gets the impression that Keats was beginning to feel a certain constriction and loneliness. Writing to his brother (How much, one wonders, did George understand of the extraordinary letters he received?) he complains

They do not know me, not even my most intimate acquaintance—I give in to their feelings as though I was refraining from irritating a little child . . . everyone thinks he sees my weak side against my will, when in truth it is with my will . . . I am content to be thought all this because I have in my own breast so great a resource . . . It is one reason they like me so; because they can all show to advantage in a room, and eclipse from a certain tact one who is reckoned to be a good poet.

In the case of a poet's letters our first interest, naturally, is in what they reveal about his attitude toward poetry, his admirations and

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distastes, his conception of his own work. References to poets other than Shakespeare are not very frequent in Keats's letters. He admired Wordsworth while thinking that he was a freak genius, "an egotistical sublime" whose didacticism had to be accepted in him but not as an example to be imitated; while he is not malicious about either, it is clear that he did not think much of the Byron and the Shelley he had read, and equally clear that there was nobody among his contemporaries whose judgment on his own poetry he really trusted or respected.

Keats is as indisputable an example as any of which we have record of a man with a vocation, whose life was consciously dedicated to poetry:

> The only thing that can ever affect me personally for more than one short passing day, is any doubt about my powers for poetry—I seldom have any, and I look with hope to the nighing time when I shall have none.

He can even put his work before writing to Fanny Brawne:

> I would feign, as my sails are set, sail on without an interruption for a Brace of Months longer—I am in complete cue—in the fever; and shall in these four Months do an immense deal—This Page as my eye skims over it I see is excessively unloverlike and ungallant—I cannot help it—I am no officer in yawning quarters; no Parson-romeo . . . My heart seems now made of iron—I could not write a proper answer to an invitation to Idalia.

Dedicated artists are liable to suffer from two complaints, a humorless over-earnest attitude toward art, and a lack of ordinary social responsibility, a feeling that what they are doing is so important that it is the duty of others to support them. Reading Rilke's letters or the Journal of Henry James, for example, there are times when their tone of hushed reverence before the artistic mystery becomes insufferable and one would like to give them both a good shaking; similarly, the incessant harping on money in the correspondence of Baudelaire or Wagner provokes in the most sympathetic admirer the reaction of a sound bourgeois—"Why doesn't he go and look for a job?"

From both of these defects Keats is completely and refreshingly free. As convinced as any writer of the seriousness and value of art, he never sounds like an abbé of the aesthetic, and, though frequently in financial difficulties, he is never extravagant with money he has been given and never forgets the reality of the situation. Thus he writes to Brown:

> I am getting into an idle-minded, vicious way of life, almost content to live upon others . . . I have not known yet what it is to be diligent. I purpose living in town in a cheap lodging, and endeavouring, for a

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beginning, to get the theatricals of some paper. When I can afford to compose deliberate poems, I will . . . I had got in the habit of mind of looking towards you as a help in difficulties . . . You will see it is a duty I owe myself to break the neck of . . .

Few solid citizens of his age, let alone artists, have shown a greater sense of family responsibility; for instance, at the same time that in a letter to his grown-up brother he is expressing heterodox theological opinions, in answer to some questions by his adolescent sister, he sends—O admirable insincerity!—a set of conventionally orthodox answers.

Lastly, the literary style of Keats's letters is of exceptional interest. In the case of most poets or novelists whose correspondence has been preserved, there is an obvious similarity between their studied compositions and their epistolary style; the Byron of *Don Juan* and the Byron of the letters are recognizably the same person, so that, reading the one, one could make a good guess, not, of course, at the quality but at the manner of the other. In Keats's case there is no such likeness; no one who had read the Odes, so calm and majestic in pace, so skillfully and tightly organized, could possibly foresee the helter-skelter rush of the letters in which the thoughts tumble over each other, defying the laws of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

It is in the letters, indeed, rather than in the poems, that one is constantly reminded directly of his idol, Shakespeare, the Shakespeare who wrote the prose of the Comedies. Passages such as the following would not seem out of place in *Much Ado* or *Twelfth Night.*

Had England been a large devonshire we should not have won the Battle of Waterloo. There are knotted oaks—there are lusty rivulets such as are not—there are vallies of femminine Climate but there are no thews and Sinews—Moor's Almanack is here a curiosity—Arms Neck and Shoulders may at least be seen there, and the Ladies read it as some out of the way romance . . . A Devonshirer standing on his native hills is not a distinct object—he does not show against the light—a wolf or two would disposses him.

. . . ready to tumble into bed so fatigued that when I am asleep you might sew my nose to my great toe and trundle me round the town like a Hoop without waking me.

. . . you had better each of you take a glass of cherry branday and drink to the health of Archimedes who was of so benign a disposition that he never would (leave) Syracuse in his Life so kept himself out of all Knight errantry—this I know to be a fact for it is written in the 45 Book of Winkine's treatise on Garden rollers that he trod on a fisherwoman's toe in Liverpool and never begged her pardon. . . . the Life of Man is like a great Mountain—his breath is like a Shrewsbury Cake—he comes into the world like a shoeblack and goes out of it like a

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Cob(b)ler—he eats like a Chimneysweeper drinks like a Gingerbread Baker and breath(e)s like Achilles.

I am inclined to believe that, as a rule, artists, even Mozart, have not died before they have completed their work (many, of course, have only too often gone on living and producing long after they had nothing left to say). On the evidence of his letters Keats was the rare and tragic exception of a man who died before he had found a style and form in which he could incarnate all sides of his sensibility. One cannot resist the temptation to speculate about what the work of his maturity might have been. Despite his interest in drama, the times in which he lived make it unlikely, I think, that he would have become a dramatist; the narrative poem seems a more promising medium. The narrative poems, *e.g. The Eve of St. Agnes,* which he did write, though beautiful in their descriptive details, suffer from a lack of narrative and character interest; the actors and their actions are too stock. Had he lived, he might well have learned how to use all the psychological insight, wit and irony which his letters show him to have possessed, in writing tales which would have made him the equal of and only successor to Chaucer.

W. H. Auden

POLICY AND NATIONAL INTEREST

AMERICAN DIPLOMACY, 1900-1950 — AND THE CHALLENGE OF SOVIET POWER. By George F. Kennan. University of Chicago Press. $2.75.

THE FORRESTAL DIARIES. By James V. Forrestal. Edited by Walter Millis with the collaboration of E. S. Duffield. Viking. $5.00.

Until rather recently, foreign policy has been on the periphery of our national attention. For the main part of the nineteenth century, Americans devoted themselves to political consolidation and economic development within the nation. The very success in building up national power had the ironic effect of thrusting the United States into the very center of the world equilibrium of power; but the crushing international responsibilities descended on a people intellectually and morally ill-prepared to receive them. Only in the past decade, indeed, has the magnitude of these responsibilities begun to be adequately recognized.

The essential problem is that foreign policy demands to be thought about in its own way and according to its own principles. The issues of international relations are not to be solved by simply applying principles already developed in domestic politics or in jurisprudence or in

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personal ethics (or, even, despite certain columnists, in the playing of chess or of poker). Like any serious art, foreign policy is a craft for professionals. Though we had a professional tradition in the early days of the republic, when our very security depended on our external relations, this vanished in the course of the nineteenth century. It is only in the past generation that this tradition has begun to revive.

George Kennan's *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* is a professional's meditations upon the half-century of awakening. Kennan, of course, is a foreign service officer of unusual literacy and thoughtfulness. Years of writing dispatches to the Department in Washington usually have a benumbing effect on the literary style of our diplomats, and often in the long run, on their intellectual habits as well. Kennan has amazingly escaped from the inhibitions of professionalism. His attack on problems is fresh, direct and penetrating; his style is graceful, subtle and sometimes moving. Above all, he approaches the past with a firm and developed philosophy of diplomacy.

The first essay (most of the book consists of lectures delivered last winter at the University of Chicago) deals with the Spanish-American War; the second, with the Open Door policy. Both illustrate for Mr. Kennan the combination of fecklessness, happenstance and confusion which attended America's stumbling entry into the great world. People occasionally had flashes as to what it was all about—Theodore Roosevelt, in certain moods, Admiral Mahan, Lewis Einstein—but in general, the key problems of foreign policy were misunderstood and ignored.

The besetting sin, in Mr. Kennan's judgment, was the legalistic-moralistic approach to international problems—the effort to define international relations in terms of abstract and formal principles of behavior, accompanied by the belief that the promulgation of these principles was a contribution to world order. This habit of mind drew on both the juridical proclivities of the lawyers who dominated our government and on the sentimental idealism of all upright Americans confronting a wicked world; in Cordell Hull, Mr. Kennan might have added (but diplomatically did not), the two motives came to classical union. Their dominance prevented Americans from thinking systematically and professionally about the concrete realities of power.

To the American mind, Mr. Kennan writes, it is implausible that people should have aspirations more important than the preservation of international peace; but this, alas, is not true; the world is far more dark, willful and turbulent than we imagine. We cannot assume that nations, like people, are moral beings (it is an insecure enough assumption about people). Thus, the only safe basis for foreign policy is

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national interest; "our own national interest is all that we are really capable of knowing and understanding." International stability comes from the accommodation of competing national interests at the "point of maximum equilibrium." What we call peace is therefore a dynamic and unstable equilibrium, threatened alike by internal change and by external rearrangement. When the equilibrium is shattered, the forces released are fanatical in their intensity and incalculable in their consequences. The problem of statecraft is to avert the extremities of force by reconciling the paradox of balance and change.

National interest, in Mr. Kennan's thinking, is simply what is good for the nation; and he readily recognizes that this is a conception which different people will charge with different implications. His own concern in this book is clearly more to make the case against legalism and moralism than to make the case for any particular version of the national interest. But he does emphasize the indispensable point that force cannot be treated as a concept outside of the given framework of purpose and method; it must be included within the philosophy of national interest. "If this were better understood, there could be neither the sweeping moral rejection of international violence which bedevils so many Americans in times of peace nor the helpless abandonment to its compulsions and its inner momentum which characterizes so many of us in times of war." And he emphasizes too that the conception of the national interest cannot be imposed upon a country; it grows out of the country; it is the outward expression of the spirit and purpose of national life. The attempt to separate foreign and domestic policy is artificial and mischievous.

> If you say that mistakes of the past were unavoidable because of our domestic predilections and habits of thought, you are saying that what stopped us from being more effective than we were was democracy, as practiced in this country. . . . A nation which excuses its own failures by the sacred untouchableness of its own habits can excuse itself into complete disaster.

In discussing democracy, Mr. Kennan cannot avoid a certain skepticism and even pessimism of tone. It is this perhaps which leads him eventually to seek refuge in the hope that the nation may yet be saved in foreign policy by learning to respect a professional elite of trained diplomats.

Beyond this, he looks for American security to be preserved by preventing any single power from dominating the Eurasian land mass; which means, he argues, that we have a special stake in the prosperity and independence of "the peripheral powers of Europe and Asia."

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This would presumably commit us to Britain and Japan as the keystones of our policy; and it is somewhat in these terms, though not very explicitly, that Mr. Kennan conducts his critique of U. S. foreign policy since 1914. If the worst danger was to shatter the world equilibrium and the next worst was to forsake the peripheral powers, then clearly we should have sought a negotiated peace in the First World War, intervening only if necessary to avert the destruction of Britain; we should have revived Germany more quickly after the war, thereby repairing the gap in the international fabric; we should never have fooled around with a Chinese solution in our Far Eastern policy, which could only have meant the abandonment of the periphery in order to enthrone chaos; and, if we had backed Germany and Japan under moderate leadership, we might have forestalled the devotees of the Thousand Year Reich and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

No one would be quicker than Mr. Kennan to admit the speculative character of his observations. One may well wonder, for example, whether the preservation of Imperial Germany or the support of Imperial Japan against China might not have whetted more appetites than it satisfied; or why the balance of power requires that we must always back the island power against the mainland, especially when the island is the seat of aggression. Baldly stated, indeed, Mr. Kennan's whole thesis may seem only a more urbane version of the *Realpolitik* to which innocents tend to turn when the facts of international life suddenly burst upon them.

But what differentiates the Kennan approach from that of, for example, the followers of Professor Hans J. Morgenthau is that he takes the revelations of international amorality in his stride; more than that, he comprehends them in his understanding of the tragedy of history. Mr. Kennan, in other words, is deeply moral, rather than moralistic, like Judge Hull, or immoral, like the boys who have just discovered that politics involve power. He does not think that international questions can be solved by the enunciation of ethical generalities; nor does he think they can be solved by a cynical division of the spoils. The fact that international relations are amoral does not mean to him that moral factors play no part; nor does it absolve the individual from moral responsibility. This, indeed, is in his view the tragedy of history: man cannot escape decision, but the complexity of events diffuses the burden of guilt, and, beyond this, so much is inherently insoluble.

In order to fill out the book, the publishers have added Mr. Kennan's two notable *Foreign Affairs* essays on the Soviet Union. They show admirably the realism, the equability and the compassion with

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which he approaches the problems of current policy. And they make admirable background reading for James V. Forrestal's day-by-day account of the gradual evolution of U.S. foreign policy under the pressure of the Soviet challenge.

The Forrestal Diaries are fascinating, but ultimately a bit empty and disappointing. In this respect, they are perhaps like their author. Jim Forrestal was one of the most interesting figures to appear in the Washington scene during the war. The son of an Irish contractor in upstate New York, he had risen by energy, intelligence and ambition through the dizzying 'twenties and the chastening 'thirties to end up as the president of Dillon, Read. I used to see him from time to time in Washington in the 'forties; he came to remind me, a little romantically perhaps, of Alexander Hamilton. Both were parvenus who had ascended from obscurity to social acceptance; both found private power ultimately unsatisfying and yearned after public power; both had personal courage and administrative clarity and energy; both were hard and incisive in their judgments, impatient of sentimentalism, ruthless toward ideas and people. They even looked somewhat alike: both were under middle height, erect in bearing, quick in movement, alert in response, captivating in manner. And both came to violent ends.

But in part, too, Forrestal could only be understood as a product of the 'twenties. He was a Fitzgerald character (he was two years ahead of Fitzgerald at Princeton); in his mad dash along the way, one felt he had lost something which he desperately wanted to recover. He did not perhaps have a genuinely reflective mind of the Kennan type; but his intellectual range was wide, and his intellectual curiosity almost compulsive. His home would be strewn with the weekly magazines of comment, both American and British; he would talk freely of Bagehot, whom he admired, and Laski, whom he hated; he was fascinated by the clash of ideas. Yet somehow his life had stripped him of ultimate solace. He was the Great Gatsby in Washington, his past transcended but never obliterated, and the reality always at essential variance with the dream.

The diaries are mostly external. In the main, they summarize the conversations and documents of which he wished to make private record. His own comment was mostly curt and impersonal. But the entries do give a remarkable picture of official Washington from 1944 to 1949. Forrestal, of course, had a sharply realistic view of foreign policy. The problem, as he saw it, was "to achieve accommodation between the power we now possess, our reluctance to use it positively, the realistic necessity for such use, and our national ideals." Like Kennan, he considered the national interest fundamental.

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I find that whenever any American suggests that we act in accordance with the needs of our own security he is apt to be called a god-damned fascist or imperialist, while if Uncle Joe suggests that he needs the Baltic Provinces, half of Poland, all of Bessarabia and access to the Mediterranean, all hands agree that he is a fine, frank, candid and generally delightful fellow who is very easy to deal with because he is so explicit in what he wants.

And, like Kennan, he feared above all the creation of "vacuums" which could only serve to attract the restless and expanding power of the Soviet Union.

Yet he lacked Kennan's brooding tragic sense; somewhere along the way his compassion had been eroded. There was a narrowness to his immediate reactions, as when he argued with Truman that Henry Wallace, then on his zany trip to Europe, should have his passport withdrawn; or, as when he assumed that all who opposed him in the bitter Palestine controversy were concerned with the Jewish vote in the United States—an assumption as unworthy as that of his opponents who said that he was acting on behalf of the oil companies. As against this narrowness, one notes the moderation and wisdom of Harriman, who of all the characters mentioned in the diaries, perhaps comes out best. From the start, Harriman's analysis and predictions, as noted down by Forrestal, were remarkably clairvoyant; Harriman understood the full implications of the Soviet menace; yet he never succumbed to the hardness which was the face Forrestal's insecurity wore to the world. Forrestal was all drive; and there was no surcease in him. Lacking inner serenity, he came to find it harder and harder to make decisions. Indecision, in the end, tore him down and drove him on to the last decision, terrible and irrevocable. Still, he was a man of courage and character. The nation remains greatly in his debt.

The bitter experience of the past generation will be entirely wasted if Americans do not accept Kennan's and Forrestal's basic point—that the only solid foundation of national action is national interest. But they must understand, as Kennan does, that this point is the beginning, and not the end, of wisdom. They must accept it within the framework of a larger acceptance of the complexity, indeterminacy, insolubility, and above all, deep sadness of history. Only such an acceptance can prevent a sense of national interest from turning into a conviction of national infallibility.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

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SIMONE WEIL AS SAINT

WAITING FOR GOD. By Simone Weil. Translated by Emma Craufurd, with an Introduction by Leslie A. Fiedler. Putnam. $3.50.

The six letters by Simone Weil which are published in this book, together with her essays, "Reflections on School Studies," "The Love of God and Affliction," "Forms of the Implicit Love of God," and "Concerning the Our Father," do not go as far as one might wish toward revealing the life and thought of this remarkable woman. Her position with regard to the Catholic Church is adequately covered by the letters, in which she makes it clear to her friend, Father Perrin, who tried to persuade her to accept baptism, that she feels she belongs outside the Church as a bridge between believers and non-believers, and that "God does not want me to join the Church . . . that I may serve [Him] in the realm of the intelligence." Her further reasons for refusing this step appear to be the desire to leave her mind open to all forms of doctrine, and suspicion of the influence of "social organizations." For fear of offending the priest, she says little about the politics of the Church—an issue that must have carried some weight with her; she speaks of such matters with great reluctance. This gives the impression that she is holding back, and not only in fear of offending her correspondent; she may be withholding from herself full recognition of her antagonism to protect a faith which is already full of perplexity. (The fact that she was Jewish is not mentioned, though this must have been of some importance.) These letters and essays fail to make clear why her baptism should have been so ardently pursued.

Since Father Perrin's letters are not included, it is possible to suggest that she imagined the heat of the pursuit to be greater than it really was. She seems to enjoy the contention for its own sake, as though she wanted to be courted and come after. She is careful not to terminate the courtship by expressing too firm an opposition to the Church; the possibility is always left open that the will of God (which she declares herself ready to obey, even if it meant damnation) will direct her to join. This may have been the woman in her, but God knows she was lonely enough.

The real reason hardly appears: that this woman enjoyed, with some regularity, genuine religious experience, Christ's coming down to possess her. Her modesty at this point (unless she has described it in her other writings) is a typical expression of her nature; she is fearful of satisfactions, of being touched too deeply, and holds herself far

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withdrawn, as though the tension of waiting and hungering were more tolerable than delight. To say nothing of love, even friendship (it is "the one legitimate exception to the duty of loving only universally") "is not really pure unless . . . surrounded by a compact envelope of indifference which preserves a distance." And so she says nothing of her experience of the divine, except that it generally comes over her during the Lord's Prayer. She suffered from migraines and these, raging during the moment of possession, enabled her to share in Christ's Passion. But exactly what happens, what the sensation and the images are, is not revealed. She passes over the experience and for the rest writes quietly, as though no crucial issue affecting the validity of mystical union, not to speak of life and death, salvation and damnation or even sanity, were involved. Even languidly; she is entirely passive and "waiting" is the essential expression of her faith. Her only striving is to hold herself in perpetual obedience to the will of God. But it does not appear to be a heroic struggle. Whatever its undisclosed fervor may have been, the contradictions and inconsistencies, the guilt trammeling both sides of the decision, and tormenting her, whose allegiances had ranged over natural science and revolutionary politics—by the time she comes to faith, she seems pale and fatigued, at most, convalescent. This is disappointing. One has a right to expect more of this woman whose credentials for religious struggle were of the most dramatic kind—"the Outsider as Saint in an age of alienation," as Leslie Fiedler says of her in his introduction, and in virtue of which he calls her, "our kind of saint."

Were it not for this, that she stands or is said to stand in a special relation to "our world," Simone Weil's case, and whatever claim to sanctity it may contain, would rest entirely with the Church. What is of concern to our world—at least to myself—is the precise nature of this relationship, and whether it is at all possible. I believe no such relationship is possible, and that it is said to exist only because the half- or quasi-religious would like to make an illegitimate use of Simone Weil's case—its withholding of final commitment to the Church—to create a middle ground on which their own religiosity can be safely supported. It seems to me that an either-or is involved, much more drastic than a good part of our generation would like to recognize, that the relation of "our world" to religion can only be all or none, and that Simone Weil, in any event, does not belong in any compromise "our" side may try to make with "theirs."

To begin with, there is no such thing as "our kind of saint." The fact that Simone Weil comes from our world is not significant,

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for all saints come from this world, from the world of alienation, despair and dreadful anguish; they leave it. Once out, they are on their own, and our world knows nothing of their salvation. If the term were to have any meaning, we should need the example of a saint returning to the scene of his renunciation, to the very beliefs he abandoned at the start of his journey. I know of no such example, and it is curious that even fiction is void of it. The great attempt in the Russian novel was to document just such a turning full circle: Chichikov redeemed, Alyosha become the Great Sinner, Nekhlyudov done wallowing in moral sensualism over the fallen Maslova, discovering purity for himself—but the return home was never more than barely outlined; it was not written. Perhaps for the very good reason that it is impossible. The saint leaves our world for good, as Simone Weil does when she says, "The object of science is the presence of Wisdom in the universe . . . the presence of Christ, expressed through matter which constitutes the world." This bars her return; she is "their" kind of saint.

I don't know how serious Mr. Fiedler was in his use of the term. Probably not very, as the whole tone of his argument derives from the substitution of literary and rhetorical categories for religious ones. The fact that Simone Weil's devotion had its absurd aspects seems to be of greater moment to this argument than its devotional character. "The Holy Fool" (she certainly was one) becomes synonymous with "The Comic Figure" (which she was not); the implied equivalence between the two terms is actually a derogation of religion, which must hold its excesses to be sacred, not comic. The important distinction here which Mr. Fiedler—he is not alone in this—fails to make, is between literature and faith. (The whole contemporary inflation of "absurd" into a religious term is based on this confusion.) So also when Mr. Fiedler speaks of the other excesses of her life—her gaucheries, her asceticism (she starved herself to death, refusing to eat, while in England, more than the ration in occupied France), her hysterical identification with the working class, which led her to work in factories at jobs she had no business doing—he skips altogether the step necessary to the identification, as though the absurd were *ipso facto* religious. But it is only when a state is already of religious significance—and this is determined by faith—that its absurdity becomes a way to God; *even* if it is absurd, not *because*.

Religion is not the only thing left out of this religious appraisal of Mlle. Weil. One would imagine that a bestowal of sanctity from within our world would at least be made in the appropriate context; so that if Mr. Fiedler is ready to celebrate Simone Weil as a religious figure be-

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cause of her patent absurdity, he should be prepared to postulate some dialectical relation between *holy* and *neurotic*. I can't blame anyone for not wanting to do this, because the relation between these two terms presents a very difficult problem, and to settle it ultimately one must perhaps also have recourse to faith—in God or in psychology (not both). But *our world!* If our world sees the Comic Figure in the Holy Fool, it must certainly see the Neurotic; and at least it must ask, even if it cannot answer the question, what bearing this category has upon the saintly. Are the terms equivalent? Can one be reduced to the other without residuum? If there is a residuum, how can it be shown to exist in Simone Weil's case? (Perhaps "our kind of saint"—to take the term seriously—would be precisely the case in which every possible discount had been made for sexual frustration and all other neurotic suffering, and still the love of God remained over, a residuum not to be reduced to psychological terms or explained away. If such a case seems to involve belief in miracles or to call for superhuman effort on the part of our saint—none has ever asked himself such questions—what else is saintliness?) In any event, how can our world speak of Simone Weil without using its own language, in which the words, severe and unforgiving though they may be, are, by definition, *hysteria, masochism,* etc.?

No, she was their kind of saint. For all her first-hand knowledge of politics, exile and universal doubt, she made her way out of our world and ceased to represent it. In her own world, in her own terms, she achieved a certain sanctity, and whatever our world may understand by this, it was, for her, whole-hearted, an absolute commitment. For which alone she deserves better of us than to be made into a Patron Saint of symposiums on literature and religion in the little magazines.

Isaac Rosenfeld

MANN'S GOTHIC ROMANCE

THE HOLY SINNER. By Thomas Mann. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. $3.50.

It is easy to say that this latest book by Thomas Mann tells a good story and tells it well. *The Holy Sinner* has all the ingredients of an entertaining Gothic romance: a double incest; murder before sexual intercourse; a baby cast adrift on the sea; shameful secrets locked away behind secret panels; self-flagellation as penitence; a duel for the honor and love of a beautiful and noble lady; several genuine miracles; divine revelations through dreams; and, finally, redemption of sin

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and suffering through grace. This makes quite a tale for a small book, especially if we add that these and other events are presented with all the trimmings of a medieval romance and with the consummate skill of a great story-teller. The reader, after an initial effort of orienting himself in this strange world, can soon relax in his chair and enjoy the skillful manner in which the author plays with him in unfolding the tale and, if he likes the subject matter, find an evening of good entertainment in this romantic allegory of a great sinner who becomes "a very great Pope."

Perhaps this is the only meaning we should read into this novel. *The Holy Sinner* is one of Thomas Mann's minor works such as he has frequently written in between or after his major novels. Coming as it does only two or three years after the amazing *Doctor Faustus* and compared with the daily output of novels, it is, of course, a literary event of the first order. But whether it is a "small masterpiece," as Mr. Spender believes it to be, depends, I suppose, on how much and what kind of meaning is read into it beyond its obvious value as good entertainment. I find this a much more difficult question and one on which I am inclined to be skeptical. I don't think that *The Holy Sinner* will be remembered as one of Thomas Mann's masterpieces. I don't think that the book will say or mean much to people now or later beyond the enjoyment of a good tale well told.

This is not to deny that *The Holy Sinner* can and perhaps must be read on a deeper level. Mr. Mann is not the kind of author who would be satisfied with merely reproducing a charming or tragic historical romance. Moreover, double incest and Christian magic provide themes behind which, I suppose, it is only natural to look for an allegorical meaning. Thus the question is not so much whether such a meaning was intended as whether it is adequately expressed.

The story of the novel is extremely simple. It deals with a double incest—the first patterned after the Narcissus myth, the second after the Oedipus myth. In the beginning of the book, a brother and sister (reminiscent of the *Blood of the Volsungs*) commit incest because they are so deeply in love with their own selves that they can only love one another. Later, the son, born of this illicit love and named Grigorss or Gregory, miraculously saved from death and raised by strangers (like Moses and Oedipus), returns to his home to marry his mother. Gregory's penance for this crime or sin consists in being chained, for seventeen years, to a rock in the sea. He again survives miraculously, and is eventually "saved" by divine grace raising him from the miserable, pitiful condition of a hairy hedgehog to the greatness and splendor of a saintly Pope.

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Gregory becomes a "very great Pope" and a very human Pope—in fact, almost a humanist in papal robes interpreting the Christian dogma in a very human, unorthodox manner. He is a very special person throughout the book, his marks of distinction being not only intelligence, beauty, melancholy sadness or a certain rashness (like Oedipus), but especially a strange capacity for the most intense concentration, a withdrawal into mysterious inner resources, whereby intelligence and physical strength are joined to create a power which is irresistible in his contacts with men as well as in the ordeal of his self-imposed penance. The act of divine grace has, as it were, its human counterpart in Gregory's capacity for mobilizing those inner resources which enable him to transcend the deepest despair and suffering.

Thus if I understand the allegory correctly, it seems to me the author wants to say something like this: Here is presented to you a tale of double incest, a monstrous tale, the greatest misfortune or sin that can befall human beings, the most deadly threat to a "human" way of life. Here is also presented to you a way of "salvation," *i.e.*, a way in which this monstrous tale, these dangerous impulses and frightful sufferings, this deadly threat can be transformed into symbols of human culture and civilized man (the Church and the "very great Pope"), because the deepest despair into which these anti-human forces can throw us also can and does mobilize, intensify, and heighten those powers in man by which he overcomes them. "Miracles" or "acts of grace" would then be merely different names to describe this process of transformation or sublimation, in short, the "humanization" of man.

If something like this is the "deeper" meaning of the book it is perhaps most adequately realized in the last and best chapter in which Pope Gregory grants audience and absolution to his mother-wife and in which he transcends sin and despair, Christian theology and Gothic romance with the simple *human* statement (his last): "Everything has its limits: the world is finite." But I doubt whether the scenes, events, and characters in the remainder of the novel are, in Eliot's terms, adequate "objective correlatives" for the expression of such a universal sentiment. To achieve this end, I think, the book as a whole would have to rise, in content and form, to the simple moving grandeur of the last scene. And this it does not do. Instead it presents, as I said in the beginning, a tableau or tapestry of characters and situations all of which, despite the ironic detachment of the author, are so vividly and literally woven into the background of a medieval Christian romance that they seem to be as far removed from the world of our meanings as the tales from the Arabian nights. Moreover, the characters of the

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novel, with the exception of Gregory, are types rather than persons: the noble duke, the suffering lady, the faithful vassal, the garrulous maid, the princes of the Church, the rough fisherman, etc. Finally, the very form and style of the novel seem to me to weigh against reading too much meaning into it. It is written with Mann's characteristic irony, detachment, and sophisticated playfulness. And in this novel, I feel, this mood is more than a stylistic technique; it carries over to the content itself. Thus I like to think that Mr. Mann relaxed and amused himself after the writing of a great and serious work like *Doctor Faustus;* and that this is, if not the only, the primary meaning of this allegory of *The Holy Sinner.* Despite its elaborate apparatus of medieval lore and Christian legend, it is, as it were, in the nature of a Satyr play after the tragedy of *Doctor Faustus.*

There is more than one obvious connection between these two novels: both deal with the same theme—evil, sin, and magic; *Doctor Faustus* already reached into the medieval sources dominating *The Holy Sinner;* in both of them the author is removed from his book by the interposition of official story-tellers (both of them, again, quite alike in spirit and temperament); and both novels close, significantly or not, with the same gesture of prayer.

Hans Meyerhoff

DREISER AND ANDERSON

THEODORE DREISER. By F. O. Matthiessen. Sloane. $3.50.
SHERWOOD ANDERSON. By Irving Howe. Sloane. $3.50.

These two biographies make a good pair. For one thing, Dreiser and Anderson had careers that ask for comparison. For another, the contrast between Matthiessen's biographical method and Mr. Howe's emphasizes the extent to which the once well-behaved muse of biography has been helling around.

Anderson, to be sure, hardly belongs in Dreiser's class as a writer; as Lionel Trilling suggested when he reviewed the Viking Portable Anderson, it is hard now to make any sort of case for Anderson. His work was a legend of its author, and, as Mr. Howe says, "at precisely those points where it jarred the most intimate and sensitive nerves of memory, the legend was least under control." This weakness was reenforced by Anderson's romantic dream of the writer as a man who could avoid the pain of daily living and by the heady faddism of the Chicago writers among whom he first worked. Beside this kind of thing, Dreiser's honesty of observation, whatever his other faults, is magnificent.

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And yet both men represented about equally for their time the escape of American literature from mere taste and gentility, its apparent emergence as a genuine expression of an American consciousness. And in one way this judgment was right. "When I read *Winesburg, Ohio* in my adolescence," says Mr. Howe, "I felt that a new world had been opened to me, new possibilities of expression, new dimensions of emotion. . . . later . . . Anderson still meant more to me than other writers of unquestionably greater achievement." Dreiser and Anderson both did this for us.

Dreiser comes as near as possible to being a man who reached maturity without any environment at all; Anderson was brought up in an environment that had disappeared before he could turn and look back at it. Both men were thus products of the enormous cultural destruction wrought by the American passion for change and novelty. Both clutched at the value of novelty, though Anderson's novelty was consciously intellectual while Dreiser's was a feeling that "the streetcars were a song"; both men, like all the best of their contemporaries, felt uneasy in this commitment and struggled to visualize a better life. Unsupported by either inherited ideas or education, their efforts were pathetic and heroic. Their resemblance is crucial and puzzling. The man who worked himself up to a $10,000-a-year editorship with Butterick by sheer skill was not very remote from the president of the Anderson Manufacturing Company and the chatty little advertisements he wrote for his *Commercial Democracy.* And the man who quit Butterick with the incomprehensible remark that "the big work was done here" and produced *Jennie Gerhardt* is no easier to explain than the Elyria businessman who had a "nervous breakdown" and became a writer.

These two lives, taken together, make a kind of personal history of the emergence of modern American literature. What shows most vividly in that history is the intolerable strain, for Americans, between the ambition to succeed according to the standards of the Elyria Country Club and the demands of the life of the mind. Anderson could have been speaking for them both when he called himself "a good deal of a Babbitt . . . but never completely that." This is not only commonplace; it is unfashionable commonplace. But it is no commonplace when you can see it lived out in actual lives. How biographers are to make you see it is something of a problem.

Matthiessen's book was unrevised when he died. Still, its basic method would hardly have been changed in revision. It consists in a straight chronological account; normally Matthiessen sticks to the

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minimum of observation ("He was more excited by the violently growing city than by anything in his life so far. . . ."). But then, at widely spaced intervals, he inserts consistently imprecise generalizations. A man seduces Dreiser's sister and then gets Dreiser out of jail; this "taught Dreiser early that there is no easy separation into evil and good"—which is at once obvious and implausible, even if Dreiser himself thought it. Beside this kind of thing, Matthiessen gives us regularly spaced literary comparisons which seem to rest on no better ground than that both writers involved were Americans. "In his detachment [Dreiser] was unlike Jack London, five years his junior, who. . . ." Or, when Dreiser notices the "gulf between rich and poor" in New York, "keenly aware of these things, . . . Henry George would run for mayor in the next campaign. . . ."

Exactly the same kind of ambiguity runs through the account of Dreiser's relations with the Communist Party, to which Matthiessen devotes a whole chapter. It is not easy to know how to take people who talk about writers' "affirming their adherence to international solidarity by the symbolic act of joining the Communist Party." There is no need to pry into the political confusion of Matthiessen's own mind suggested by such remarks: he is dead, perhaps partly as a result of it. Still, as his main effort to explain the meaning of Dreiser's career, it leaves something to be desired.

Mr. Howe's effort to explain Anderson is far more serious. From his very first sentence—"in the economy of late-19th-century America, Ohio was unique among the states"—he is seeking an order of meaning. But before he knows it he finds himself with half a dozen highly abstract and differing systems on his hands. That first sentence, for example, is followed up by an application of " 'the law of combined development' " to Ohio. The "pertinence" of Anderson's work "to the development of American industrial society"—"whether Anderson was aware of [it] . . . hardly matters: it is there and it is right"—is a main concern. As an account of Anderson's work that development seems curiously remote. Mr. Howe is also interested in anthropology and psychology. "Here [Anderson] had dipped into the unconscious resources of the race, for the archetypal caress is a collective datum as well as an individual experience." Of the unquotable documents Anderson produced during his famous breakdown, Mr. Howe tells us that they show "a general confusion as to sex role which is manifested in symbols indicating a retreat from masculinity, etc." Of Anderson's use of a narrator, he tells us that "sensing that story-telling had once been a ceremony in which the listener expected the narrator . . . [to] fulfill

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his communal role, Anderson quite cunningly tried to re-establish something of this atmosphere of ritual in his stories." After a while you begin to look around for Anderson the existentialist and Anderson the Neo-Thomist.

It is not so much that all these observations may not be true—though that is certainly doubtful enough to make Mr. Howe's dogmatic assertion of them dangerous—as that they are so remote from the immediate question and so much at odds with one another. In some ultimate judgment, "the development of American industrial society" may be our only criterion of value; but at the moment it does not appear to be. Even if we go along with Mr. Howe in this kind of thing, we find ourselves struggling to reconcile Anderson the reflector of "the development of American etc." with Anderson the dipper into the unconscious resources of the race, and all the other Andersons.

I think we ought not to blame Mr. Howe very much for all this; he has tried to do what any biographer who takes his job seriously must try to do; namely, to find a frame of ideas which will enable him to understand his man. That he comes up with a handful instead of one is only in very small part his fault. If we have to choose between his method and Matthiessen's, I expect we will all choose his. Perhaps he might have been a little more suspicious that our muse has turned wench, but it is not his fault that she has.

Arthur Mizener

DICTATORS AND MOBS

THE ORIGINS OF TOTALITARIANISM. By Hannah Arendt. Harcourt, Brace. $6.75.

Hannah Arendt's subject has played so large a part in our lives, it comes as a shock to awake to the awareness of how little we know of its nature. Perhaps in this last decade the imminence of the threat was too great to allow us the pause in which we might recognize the antagonist we wrestled in the shadows. Mostly, the fragmentary items, in the nature of testimony by those who have themselves suffered the blows of the struggle, have given us impressions of the intensity of the crisis rather than understanding of the underlying forces involved. It is Hannah Arendt's achievement to bring us a long way toward such understanding.

This volume consists of three loosely connected essays, each dealing with an aspect of the emergence of totalitarianism. A survey of the development of European anti-Semitism in the nineteenth century

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down to the Dreyfus Affair attempts to demonstrate how the peculiar social and economic situation of the Jews established a connection between them and the state, and eventually made them the obvious butts of the attacks of all those hostile to the established polity. An examination of the genesis of modern imperialism probes also into the sources of racism and reveals the means through which expansion undermined the stability of the nation-state and ultimately of the rights of man. The final essay treats totalitarianism itself—as an ideology, as a movement seeking control, and as a functioning system of power.

To her task Miss Arendt brings a maturity of political judgment that springs from her exceptional powers of philosophical analysis and from a clear consciousness of the nature of the realistic determinants of government. Many sections of the work are illuminating and generally, even the digressions are rewarding for their insight.

The central contribution of the volume is the delineation of the exact features that distinguish totalitarianism from other modes of political organization. Totalitarianism, as it appeared in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and in Germany after 1940 was not simply another version of the ancient or modern dictatorships; it was not even simply another police state. It embodied rather an altogether novel pattern of power organization, the ends of which were global domination, the means of which were total terror. Installed with the aid of the mob, maintained by appeals to the masses, and obsessed with the need of implementing a rigid ideology, totalitarianism operated with a complete and destructive disregard of material reality. Its ideal end results were the concentration camps and the crematoria.

There are particular stages of her analysis, at which I question the validity of Miss Arendt's interpretation, and there are points at which the discontinuity of the essays does not permit her to do justice to her own arguments. But these are minor matters. The reader with the patience and intelligence to get beyond a rather difficult style and to comprehend the skill and subtlety with which Miss Arendt refines and elaborates her concepts will lay the book down with a clear understanding of how totalitarianism came into being.

I am not however sure he will understand why. What, after all, is essentially unprecedented in totalitarianism? Not the global ambitions; dreams of universal imperium tormented many a tyrant before the twentieth century. Not the denial of common humanity; seventeenth-century Englishmen in America called the Indians "imps of Satan" and meant it quite literally. Not even the use of total terror as an instrument of policy; the counselors of Henry VIII in the sixteenth

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century seriously debated the proposal "to enterprise the hole exterpation and destruction of all the Irishmen of the land" and regretfully surrendered the project because the expense of the slaughter was too great. Perhaps Hitler did better simply because technological progress had supplied him with the mechanical means of lowering the cost.

What is new, I think Miss Arendt would agree, is the implication of the masses, an implication so thorough that they become accomplices in the terrorism that the fuehrer will, sooner or later, direct against them all. Yet it is the history of the masses that is least clear in this volume.

Miss Arendt refers in general terms to the process of atomization, by which large sectors of the population through unemployment or displacement find themselves rootless and are overwhelmed with feelings of superfluity. The process itself is enormously complicated and one which I think we do not yet understand. Nevertheless it is clear that those who suffer from the process do not always throw themselves into the destructive totalitarian communion. Rootlessness and displacement have been characteristic of all of Western society for perhaps a century, concomitants of the disintegration of the old structure of economic, family, and religious life. But at some times and in some places the mass of people have not allowed themselves to be dragged into the ranks of the masses; they have found alternative modes of relief from the oppressive burdens of the sense of superfluity and have resisted the fatal attractions of totalitarianism. It is one of the pressing intellectual problems of our times to uncover the conditions under which such resistance is and is not effective.

In a penetrating observation quoted by Miss Arendt, David Rousset speaks of the "brotherhood of abjection" to which totalitarianism subjects victims and executioners alike. We do not know enough yet to understand the profound changes in the human condition that brotherhood involved. And we have not much time to learn.

Oscar Handlin

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HOW CHINA WAS LOST

THE CHINA STORY. By Freda Utley. Regnery. $3.50.

The delusion that we can concentrate on Europe to the exclusion of Asia is as dangerous as the contrary delusion that the issue will be settled in Asia alone. Whichever bloc succeeds in arming the overwhelming manpower reserves of Asia with the techniques, cultural, political and industrial, of the West, will win the world. Therefore, the most important political problem of the moment is to determine how we lost 450 million allies in China. It is the fact that she addresses herself with wisdom and sobriety to this problem that makes Freda Utley's *The China Story* one of the most important books of the last decade.

The Chinese culture whose disruption the present generation is witnessing, whether measured by the length of time which it has endured or by the number of human beings which it has organized into a comparative homogeneity of blood and language and outlook, is the most successful of all the civilizations which man has so far known. In its very success, in the pressure of its amazing population upon its resources; in the eruption of the Western and semi-westernized powers into China with the aid of the superior material force of a machine culture; in the need to industrialize and to master the military-mechanical aspects of the invading civilization in order to oust the invaders and restore China's dignity and independence—here lie the real problems of the Chinese Revolution. The very age of this civilization, its early superiority and high achievements, have tended to slow up the rate of change, and make change more difficult, more necessary, more unsettling. Yet neither does it need to "abolish feudalism" (it did so in the third century B.C. and its basic agrarian problem is the pressure of a teeming population on the divided and subdivided pocket-handkerchief farm); nor can the Chinese Revolution be properly regarded as a mere obligation to "catch up" with the West or reproduce the fearful patterns of the Russian Revolution and Counter-Revolution in telescoped form.

Until 1945, without our fully recognizing China's problem as one of transforming herself in terms of her own ancient heritage, America nevertheless looked upon China with sympathy and for a half-century had followed the traditional policy of seeking to preserve her territorial integrity and independence. At Yalta, in 1945, the United States reversed this policy and agreed to the dominion of the Soviet Union

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over Manchuria, the industrial base of any possible "modernization" of China, to Russia's control over Port Arthur and Dairen, "joint operation" of the Manchurian railways by China and Russia, "pre-eminent interests" for the Soviet Union in that area, and the further outflanking of China by Soviet control of northern Korea and the islands north of Japan. The rights we there gave away were not ours to give. The story Freda Utley tells is the story of what influences prevailed to reverse our traditional foreign policy, and what consequences flowed from that reversal.

It is a pity that Miss Utley does not show, as she easily might have, that there are only two politically organized forces in China: the Kuomintang, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, fighting against the most incredible odds for the territorial independence and integrity of China and her transformation on the basis of her own ancient heritage; and the Chinese Communists under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung or whatever puppet or combination of puppets Stalin may choose in his place, fighting for the subordination of China to the rule of the Kremlin. She underestimates the complacent ignorance of the average American intellectual concerning the real forces in conflict in China, and the degree to which most Americans are victims of one of the greatest campaigns of psychological warfare in all history.

But that campaign itself, and how Americans fell victims to it, is the heart of her story. Most interesting is her examination of the "Case of Owen Lattimore," after the Hiss case the most interesting *cause célèbre* of American intellectual and political life. From Agnes Smedley, through Owen Lattimore, John K. Fairbank, Edgar Snow, Nathaniel Peffer, Theodore White, Annalee Jacoby, Richard Lauterbach, Harrison Forman, and Gunther Stein, she traces one of the most striking examples of propagandistic inbreeding and mutual log-rolling that American culture has ever exhibited. How they echoed each other, reinforced each other, reviewed each other's books, and disposed of any China authority who managed to get published a book which questioned their line, how they influenced the public and the policy-makers, is a story told in quiet and remorseless detail. Her chapter on Lattimore—his defense of the blood purges as "part of a new advance in the struggle to set free the social and economic possibilities of a whole nation . . . (which may) give the ordinary citizen more courage to protest"; his attack on the Truman Doctrine; his misrepresentation of the quantity and the continuity of our aid to the Chinese government; his repudiation of the war in Europe as one "between the established master races and the claimant master races" until Hitler attacked Stalin; his finding in Chiang

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Kai-shek "an Asiatic statesman of real genius" while the Communist party line was to support Chiang against Japan; his urging that the United States get out of Korea, distrust Synghman Rhee, give Chiang no support in Formosa, accept a proposal to recognize the Kremlin's imperialist puppet as the government of China, withdraw our forces from Japan, refuse to support a pact of Asiatic countries to defend themselves against Communist aggression—with restraint and considerable care and a weighing of all Lattimore's subtle qualifications of his shifting line, Miss Utley builds up a picture that will carry overwhelming conviction to all who care to study the record. Her only mistake is to defend the ill-prepared and blundering overstatements of Senator McCarthy, which have provided an unexpected defense of Lattimore by making the true picture as it gradually emerges seem an anti-climax in place of a convincing indictment.

Miss Utley's criticism of our policy-makers for their share of responsibility for the weakening of China's struggle for independence is also done with sober restraint. She finds that the Republican Party and the general articulate public held the same illusions as the policy-makers. Only one important process escapes her notice: the extent to which the line of the policy-makers has become firm since the Korean war began. In this regard, but in this regard only, her book is out of date. True the responsible officials have failed to acknowledge their errors—an acknowledgment which would have enormous sanitive and educative value but one which it is perhaps too much to expect from fallible human beings approaching an electoral melee. But if they have failed to acknowledge their errors, they are not failing to correct them, as rapidly, on the whole, as the enormously deteriorated situation permits. For policy-makers as well as for all thoughtful Americans who are pondering the problem of how we lost 450 million allies and what we can still do to cut the losses and reverse the trend, Freda Utley's *China Story* is the most important work that has so far been published on our relations with contemporary China.

Bertram D. Wolfe

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F. R. Leavis

EZRA POUND: THE PROMISE AND THE DISASTER[1]

One would say that the volume of Pound's *Letters,* in sum, made tragic reading, if only the disaster it records weren't accompanied by so much that is brutally without dignity, and where it is comic, often odious too. The disaster, in fact, was a long degeneration, and is tragic only in that there had been something so admirable and heroic about the hero. The Pound who came to England in 1908 showed a wonderful energy of disinterested intelligence and public spirit. Never, in the literary world, has there been a more courageous single-mindedness. "Until someone is honest we get nothing clear." "It is only when a few men who

1. Mr. Leavis' piece originally appeared in *Scrutiny* for June 1951, as a review of *The Letters of Ezra Pound* (Harcourt, Brace. $5.00). We are reprinting it because it seems to us to be of the utmost relevance to the discussion of Pound's position and influence.—THE EDITORS

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know get together and *disagree* that any sort of criticism is born." "Isn't it worth while having *one* critic who won't say a thing is *good* until he is ready to stake his whole position on the decision?" "You offer to find a publisher . . . if I abrogate my privileges, if I give way to, or saddle myself with, a damn'd contentious, probably incompetent committee. If I tacitly, tacitly to say the least of it, accept a certain number of people as my critical and creative equals, and publish the acceptance." "Dear H[arriet] M[onroe]: No, most emphatically I will not ask Eliot to write down to any audience whatsoever. I dare say my instinct was sound enough when I volunteered to quit the magazine quietly about a year ago. Neither will I send you Eliot's address in order that he may be insulted."

He forced Eliot on Harriet Monroe's Chicago *Poetry,* and with a patent absence of concern for anything but the reputation, livelihood and development of poets and writers, did what he could to get them published and known, and to make such organs as he could start, commandeer or get a hand in, serve his magnanimous purposes. To discover and launch Eliot—that is a historic achievement. He may claim also a large part of the credit for Joyce. Whom else did he push?—Wyndham Lewis, in recording which item we come, it seems to me, to the other side of the account, and to Pound's limitations. For these, which are very serious in a man who has been so influential, have to be insisted on, and at length.

Wyndham Lewis' reputation as a writer was established by the efforts of the Egoist group, in which Pound played so large a part. As a result, that reputation—which cannot, I believe, bear the beginnings of critical scrutiny—enjoyed the support of Eliot's rising prestige in the 1920s. Eliot remained faithful till at least the middle 'thirties (and today we are in danger of having *Tarr* and *The Childermass* revived and pressed on us as memorable works). I stress the instance of Wyndham Lewis, because he is representative; he represents a kind of toughness—a truculent inhumanity or anti-humanity ("My God, they stink!"), a mechanistic externality—an attraction to which is to be found in Eliot as well as Pound. (It is to be noted, too, that while Pound backed Mussolini, and Wyndham Lewis wrote a book in favor of Hitler, Eliot drew inspiration for such distinctive ethos as *The Criterion* had from Charles Maurras.)

If we ask what other poets Pound backed (other than Robert Frost), the answer is that it is hard to remember, because on the whole they matter so little. And here again we have Pound's limitations.

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A POET'S YOUTH

By ALLAN DOWLING

Twenty years ago, FRANK HARRIS, about whom GEORGE BERNARD SHAW said, "He can bend the bow of Ulysses and other critics cannot," wrote to Allan Dowling, "I hope more considerable things from you in poetry and in literature than from any young man I have met." And, in a letter to Shaw, Harris wrote, "Dowling is the ablest American I have seen in these long years."

JOHN MACY, one of the outstanding critics of the time, wrote, "Your poems have one fundamental quality: they sound as if you meant them, as if they originated in a real emotional impulse, a feeling, idea, and were not made merely by electrical light and the determination to write verse. When do we see the next volume?"

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And yet it was, beyond question, a strong intelligence that influenced Eliot—and Yeats—beneficently at a crucial moment, and earned Pound an illustrious place in the history of English poetry. He encouraged Yeats in his emergence out of the incantations of the Celtic Twilight into speech-rhythms and a use of language spare, taut, and ironical. He knew what, in a post-Swinburnian climate, had to be said to the young talent if there was to be any hope of a prosperous development. "Verse ought to be at least as well written as prose"—this was a dictum that Pound could enforce in cogent (and constructive) particular criticism.

"I think," says Mr. Eliot in the essay of his reprinted in Mr. Russell's volume,[2] "that Pound was original in insisting that poetry was an art, an art which demands the most arduous application and study, and in seeing that in our time it has to be a highly conscious art." In order to indicate the nature of a promising addiction to "art," more, of course, is needed than a reference to the Provençal patterns that Pound cultivated. What more, Mr. Eliot provides in a couple of sentences further on:

2. *An Examination of Ezra Pound.* Edited by Peter Russell. New Directions. $3.75.

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The business of the poet is to be more conscious of his own language than other men, to be more sensitive to the feeling, more aware of the meaning of every word he uses, more aware of the history of the language and of every word he uses, than other men.

The more one ponders it the more difficult a concept does "language" become to delimit. To be sensitive to a language is to be sensitive to a culture. You can only hope to be sensitive to a language of the past, or to a foreign language, out of your sensitiveness to your own contemporary culture—out of your sensitiveness to your own language, your sensitiveness and consciousness in the present.

And here we come again to Pound's limitations. How can he have offered with such conviction his Guides, his *How to Reads,* his quintessential propaedeutics for poets, with their prescriptions of Provençal, medieval Italian, Chinese, and so on? How could he discriminate so perversely and confidently in favor of so dull a set of conventions as the Provençal—conventions with so inferior a culture behind them and in them? when the Middle Ages have so much to offer that is so much more worth study, and in the past of his own language? "Really one DON'T need to know a language. One NEEDS, damn well needs, to know the few hundred words in the few really good poems that any language has in it." He didn't really know what a culture was at all—in spite of his noble desire "to set the arts in their rightful place as the acknowledged guide and lamp of civilization." Though he boasted that, "neither Irish nor Catholic, I have had more medieval contact than most, through Dante and my Provençal," he knew about medieval civilization essentially nothing. And he knew about Europe, one is driven to say too, essentially nothing.

For the admirable American energy and disinterestedness and generosity that were his virtues carried with them certain attendant disabilities. He glimpsed in poetry and art light and significance that should, he felt, make life worth living; and he devoted himself with magnificent single-mindedness to the service of what he saw. But of the nature of that and its relation to life, he had only the most limited understanding—barbarian, one is inclined to say, but the barbarians had cultures in precisely the sense that Pound remained unaware of. He could judge that he had been born "in a half-savage country," but the unawareness persisted invincibly. "It takes about 600 to make a civilization," he says in 1928. Anyone who doubts the significance of this should ponder the following:

The Greek populace was PAID to attend the great Greek tragedies, and darn well wouldn't have gone otherwise, or if there had been a cinema.

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Shakespeare was "Lord Somebody's players"; and the Elizabethan drama, as distinct from the long defunct religious plays, was a court affair.

As for the degeneration, that becomes apparent when Pound takes to Social Credit (and Mussolini). "He saw," says the editor in his Foreword, "Europe drifting towards a war that could have been avoided by a simple currency reform." About the bullying willfulness of conviction with which Pound, in and out of season, asserted that things *were* as simple as that there was not only an element of Jonsonian comedy; there was also something repellently brutal, a certain native tough and truculent insensitiveness turning into a positive vice. And here we come to the famous "brilliant epistolary style."

The letters do indeed exhibit a racy vigor and a strong directness and bite, conveying the courage and grapple of a live disinterested mind. But from early on there are characteristics that, long before the end of the volume, have become a boring exasperation. There is that facetious and utterly pointless misspelling which Pound indulges in as soon as—which is very readily (even—a piquant situation—in writing to my old headmaster)—he feels that he has established an epistolary familiarity with a correspondent. So far from growing out of it he grows into it, and at the best it is the sign of a portentous established immaturity.

But it is worse than that; it goes with something that is also immaturity *and* worse: "The French," he says, "have a word of five letters and the English of four." In the one letter I have from Pound (and which I did not hand over to the editor—but because of its manner of referring to a distinguished poet and critic, and early friend of Pound) the "brilliant epistolary style" is mainly a matter of the repetition of the English word. That word, in the Letters, has for abundant company a great deal of the same order, and, in spite of some variety of a kind (*e.g.* "bug-headed ape") the total effect is that of the maddening and depressing monotony of Army obscenity.

It is more than a superficial foible; as we see it growing on the letter-writer we see a certain native (or cultural) insensitiveness, indulged and sanctioned, developing into a repellently ugly and inhuman brutality. Pound, translating the Shelleyan exaltations about the creative mind, writes: "Humanity is malleable mud, and the arts set the mold it is later cast into." It is significant that, in the same letter, two sentences further on, he writes: "Victoria was an excrement, Curtis, Lorrimer, *all* British journalism are excrement," etc. The significance—the relation of these habits of expression to the bullying and overbearing

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absoluteness with which Pound advanced his simple panacea—is to be seen in the scatological Cantos. "Inhuman brutality" too strong a description for what the toughness, the coarseness, the lack of something, comes to be?—Consider the attitude that Pound found himself able to take toward the systematic, and unspeakably atrocious, doing to death of the Jews of Europe. The spectacle of Pound's degeneration is a terrible one, and no one ought to pretend that is anything but what it is.

And this painfully limited mind, which does not know what a civilization is, and can suppose that to appreciate the best poems in a language you need only know as much of the language as the poems contain, is credited (see the essays in Mr. Peter Russell's collection) with having created a modern epic: "No one ever knew his own mind more clearly," says Mr. Hugh Kenner. "Indeed the didactic gestures emerge naturally from the store-house of volitional forms. . . ." The poet of the Cantos "knows his own mind" clearly in the sense that what his technique is devoted to conveying is nothing substantially more than what, at the platform level, the didactic, conscious will dictates. And that confident domineering didactic consciousness is not the servant of any vital underlying theme, or of any rich sense of positive life. Mr. Eliot said the damning thing about Pound's moral inspiration when he remarked that Pound's hells "are for the other people." What comes up from below is hatred and the will to reduce life to what can give excuse for hatred and contempt and disgust. (Pound, like Eliot, dislikes Lawrence and is drawn to Wyndham Lewis—who also dislikes Lawrence.) Whatever the intensity of "art" represented by the Cantos, the effect, for all the famous skill and variety of versification, is barrenness and monotony. *Mauberley* stands alone—a great poem; the art there is creative, the expression of a young, strong, generous and still sensitive mind.

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